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# **THE NEW LOCAL ACTIVISM IN RUSSIA: BIOGRAPHY, EVENT, AND CULTURE**

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ACADEMIC DISSERTATION

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## ABSTRACT

In this monograph, the author analyzes a new type of politicized local activism that emerged as an outcome of the nationwide post-election 2011-12 protests in Russia, while these protests have been widely criticized for their political vagueness. Outwardly, new local groups resembled numerous activist groups that were active before the post-election mobilization. However, the pre-protest local activism was deliberately “apolitical” and focused on concrete and small problem-solving, while the post-protest local activism combined oppositional politics and “real deeds” tactics. This integration of opposite practices and meanings led to the emergence of the new politicized civic culture. The question the author answers is how the event of the protest mobilization could lead to the long-term changes in activist political culture. Considering this political evolution, she focuses on activists’ biographical trajectories. Basing on qualitative data (interviews, focus-groups, and observations of local activists groups organized in Moscow and St. Petersburg) and the existing theories of social movement studies, social events and political socialization, the monograph proposes a new approach to the analysis of social and cultural changes through an event.

The results show that patterns of activists’ socialization highly influenced the types of their future political involvement. Moreover, the post-election protest as an *event* (in terms of W. Sewell, 1996) helped people with different experiences who would never meet and act together before (e.g., apolitical volunteering and oppositional struggle) suddenly find themselves together and pushed them to continue their activity. Meanings and know-how that ordinarily are at odds (apolitical ideology of “helping people” and politics) met in post-protest local activism, thus creating new hybrid forms of civic participation and negotiating the opposition between the apolitical and the political.

In the scholarly literature on an event and a biography, biographies are considered usually among the things an event can influence on, together with social structure, cultural meanings etc. In the monograph, it is argued that the biography can be considered as an important tool, helping scholars to understand *how exactly* an event influence on structure or culture. The socialization taken in interactionist perspective, i.e., as the careers and not as the set of more or less stable dispositions, is a necessary tool to study how different experiences, visions and know-how are accumulated, transferred from one place to another, find each others in the same groups or even the same lives, and how all these processes finally contribute to the creation of new elements of political culture. In this monograph thus, the author claims that in order to explain social movement transformations and changes produced by an event, people’s biographies should be brought back into the analysis.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is usually hard to say when exactly one starts a research project, especially when the project has reached its end. This is not the case with this project. This research started on the 4th of December 2011. On that cold winter day, parliamentary elections took place in Russia. Already on the evening of election day, people started spontaneously to gather at the central squares of big Russian cities claiming that the election was not fair. It was the beginning of the biggest nationwide mobilization in Russia since the early nineties.

This mobilization was expected neither by the public nor by political experts and academics. Scholars in the social sciences and humanities immediately became interested in studying and explaining it. At that time, I was an MA student at the European University at St. Petersburg. My friends and I organized an independent research group – “Public Sociology Laboratory” – and started to conduct interviews at every protest rally in St. Petersburg and Moscow. It is the beginning of the project that is described in this monograph. None of this research would have been possible without my colleagues from the “Public Sociology Laboratory,” colleagues with whom I have been continuing to work all these years. I want to thank Oleg Zhuravlev, Natalya Saveleva and Maxim Alyukov for collecting data with me, for arguing a lot about data analysis, for reading and commenting on all my drafts, and for having a lot of fun.

I started to work on this research as a dissertation project when I applied to the PhD program at the European University at St. Petersburg in 2013. At that time, Artemy Magun helped me on my journey as a supervisor, and I’m grateful to him for his support and advice. A special thanks also goes to Carine Clement who was teaching the “Social movement studies” course at the EUSP at the time and was always involved in my research—commenting on almost all my drafts and sharing her own insightful research experience. Carine also introduced me to many other scholars who were helpful on my way. This research would have looked completely different if I would not have met Carine. Elena Zdravomyslova and Olivier Fillieule have also read several early drafts of my manuscript and their critical comments were always challenging and thought-provoking. They improved my writing a lot.

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At the end of this visiting fellowship my 3-years PhD program at EUSP was over as well. At this time I had finished the first full draft of my dissertation and was going to finalize it over one year. However, life never goes as planned, and the teaching license of the European University was revoked because of its “too liberal” reputation in Russia. My classmates and I had no place to defend our dissertations. Vladimir Gelman did incredible work coming up with the idea of our collective transfer to the University of Helsinki and helping all of us along the hard way of this transfer. Vladimir is the type of person whom you can email any time of day and who would answer you in a few hours with helpful advice and encouragement. Ira Janis-Isokangas and other colleagues from the Aleksanteri Institute worked on our transfer from Helsinki’s side, and obviously, this dissertation would never be defended without them.

At this period of my journey, I met Tuomas Ylä-Anttila and Risto Alapuro who agreed to be my supervisors at the University of Helsinki. Even though I have experience studying in several universities and working with many supervisors, these relationships were two of the best experiences of supervised work for me. Sometimes I even regret that I defend my dissertation only a year after meeting Tuomas and Risto and without the opportunity to work with them as supervisors for longer. Tuomas and Risto had a rare talent to find weak places in the text; yet, instead of criticizing my arguments, they always gave very concrete recommendations on how to make the text stronger. After every meeting with them, I almost physically felt how my dissertation was developing and becoming better. When I first came to meet them, I was a total stranger from a foreign university, but they made me feel like I was at home almost immediately. Tuomas did a huge amount of work in helping me with all the bureaucratic issues related to my transfer from EUSP, directing me through the whole journey towards defense, and answering my jejune questions about how things work at the University of Helsinki. I am so grateful to Tuomas Ylä-Anttila and Risto Alapuro for everything they have done for me.

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I am writing these words now sitting in my office at the Aleksanteri Institute of the University of Helsinki. I am thankful to the Aleksanteri Institute for giving me the opportunity to have a visiting fellowship here to finish my work on the dissertation. At the research seminar at Aleksanteri I presented the results of the whole project for the first time, and the reaction of the audience was truly inspiring. I am grateful to my friends and colleagues at Aleksanteri who are staying with me while I am going through the nervous time of preparing for my defense, who are helping me with information and advice, and who sometimes just calm me down. Margarita Zavadskaya is especially involved in this process. The hard daily work of the

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While finishing work on the manuscript, I was teaching at the School of Advanced Studies, University of Tyumen. And I am really thankful to my great students who kept me believing that I am doing something interesting and important. My close friends and colleagues – Irina Surkichanova, Maxim Alyukov, Oleg Zhuravlev, and Zachary Reyna – were always near me at different parts of this journey. I would have still made it even without you guys, but my life would be boring and meaningless without you, and then why would I even need a dissertation?

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# CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .....	10
CHAPTER I. EVENT, BIOGRAPHY AND POLITICAL CULTURE: LITERATURE REVIEW .....	14
1.1.    Event and Biography .....	14
1.1.1.    Event and Social Movement Studies .....	14
1.1.2.    Event and its Micro-Analysis: Biography .....	17
1.1.3.    Activist Biography and Two Approaches to Study It.....	20
1.1.4.    Biography in Dynamics: the Chicago School of Sociology and the Concept of an Activist Career.....	24
1.2.    Local Activism, Political Culture and “Group Style”.....	28
1.2.1.    Local Activism vs Politics.....	29
1.2.2.    Political Culture .....	31
1.2.3.    Activist Political Culture in Russia before the “For Fair Elections” Movement: “Rise in Generality” .....	34
1.2.4.    Activist Political Culture in Russia after the “For Fair Elections” movement: the New Group Style.....	38
1.3.    Conclusion and Research Objectives .....	40
CHAPTER II. METHODOLOGY.....	42
2.1. Methodological Approach.....	42
2.2. Data Collection .....	43
2.3. Data Description.....	45
2.4. Data Analysis .....	49
2.5. Research Ethic .....	51
CHAPTER III. HOW SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND POLITICAL CULTURE CONTRIBUTED TO THE “FOR FAIR ELECTIONS” MOVEMENT AND LOCAL ACTIVISM .....	53
3.1. Political Landscape Before the “For Fair Elections” Movement.....	53

3.2. Specific Features and Existing Explanations of the “For Fair Elections” Movement Emergence .....	55
3.3. Expansion of Real Deeds Rhetoric and Politicization of Election Observation ....	60
3.4. Political Landscape After the “For Fair Elections” Movement .....	63
3.5. The New Local Activism as a “Spin-off” Movement .....	64
3.5.1. “Civic Association” .....	67
3.5.2. “Headquarters” .....	68
3.5.3. “People’s Council” .....	69
3.5.4. “Public Council” .....	70
<b>CHAPTER IV. ACTIVIST CAREERS AND POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION OF LOCAL ACTIVISTS .....</b>	<b>73</b>
4.1. Social Background of Local Activists .....	74
4.1.1. General Socio-Economic Characteristics .....	74
4.1.2. Generation .....	74
4.1.3. Social Composition of the New Local Activist Groups: Middle Class, Inteligencia or... ? .....	76
4.2. Common Patterns of Involvement in Local Activism .....	78
4.3. Four Types of Activist Careers .....	80
4.3.1. “Doers” .....	80
4.3.2. “Volunteers” .....	87
4.3.3. “Oppositional thinkers” .....	91
4.3.4. “Oppositionists” .....	95
4.4. Three Exceptional Trajectories .....	100
4.5. Conclusion .....	102
<b>CHAPTER V. POLITICAL CULTURE AND BIOGRAPHY: HOW ACTIVIST CAREERS CONTRIBUTED TO THE GROUP STYLE .....</b>	<b>105</b>
5.1. The Beginning: Two Opposite Approaches to Local Activism .....	106
5.1.1. “Real Deeds for Their Own Sake” .....	106
5.1.2. “Real Deeds as a Means of Political Struggle” .....	108

5.2. Two Approaches to Local Activism and Activist Careers.....	110
5.2.1. “Oppositionists” and “Oppositional thinkers”: Real Deeds as a Means of Political Struggle.....	111
5.2.2. “Doers”: Two Approaches Simultaneously.....	113
5.2.3. “Volunteers”: “Real Deeds for Their Own Sake” .....	114
5.3. New Group Style .....	116
5.3.1. The Evolution of Thinking and Visions in Follow-up Interviews and Focus- Groups.....	117
5.3.2. Why This Is a New Group Style? .....	118
5.3.3. How the New Group Style Has Emerged .....	120
5.4. Conclusion .....	126
CHAPTER VI. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION .....	128
6.1. Event, Biography and Political Culture: Summary of the Main Arguments .....	128
6.2. Event and Biography .....	132
6.3. Local Activism, Political Culture, and Group Style.....	135
6.4. Event, Biography, and Political Culture.....	139
6.5. Limitations and Directions for Future Research .....	141
6.6. Epilogue: Why These All Matter? .....	142
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	146
ATTACHMENT 1.....	158

## INTRODUCTION

The prevailing opinion is that people in Russia are passive and politically indifferent, and that is why democratic changes are difficult there. None of this is true.

For example, Victor takes part in every cultural school activity in his childhood, and he is a member of school Parliament. He is fascinated by journalism from his school years, and he is devoted to his profession and contributes to many journalist projects without any financial reward. Tamara helps orphan homes as a child and continues her charitable activity as a young adult – she even decides to occupy a low-wage job position in a charity foundation. Denis is interested in politics from his youth, and he follows political events, not only in Russia, but in the world in general, and he criticizes the Russian government's policy a lot. Kirill hates cultural school activities as imposed from above and never takes part in them, but he regularly participates in opposition rallies when he was eighteen, and he eventually joined a radical opposition party. All of them are obviously quite active, but they are active in different ways and there are a lot of people in Russia who have similar experience as Victor, Tamara, Denis or Kirill.

What is more important is that there was almost no chance for Victor and Tamara to meet Denis and Kirill before 2011 in Russia; they lived in the same neighborhood, but in different worlds. In one world, some of them were getting real things done and were helping particular people, while in other worlds, others were interested in mainstream politics and were fighting with the authorities in power, looking down skeptically on “one issue activism” and charity activities. As follows from geometry's axiom, these parallel worlds were mutually disjointed.

The situation was changed in 2011 when Victor, Tamara, Denis, and Kirill met each other at the same post-election protest rally in Moscow (the so-called “For Fair Elections” movement), and half a year later, became involved in local activism in their neighborhood together. At this point, two worlds suddenly intersected one another. Before 2011 and in the beginning of 2012, Victor and Tamara were helping particular people needed help and were ‘fixing benches’ in order to get real things done, while Denis and Kirill were challenging the political regime and president Putin personally, on the streets and on the Internet. Four years later, in 2015-16, all four of them, and plenty of other people with similar biographical trajectories were fixing the benches in their neighborhoods together, but in doing so, they did not just help particular people anymore, and they were fighting Putin by this very act. Fixing benches in the neighborhood, they demonstrated how inactive and corrupt authorities in power were, and created a real alternative to them at the local level. In a way, they were fixing benches against Putin. The event of the “For Fair Elections” movement made the meeting of the people with different biographical experiences in the same time and space possible, and this meeting has led to the changes in activist political culture in Russia: oppositional politics and getting real things done practice became integrated in single frame. The current monograph tells this short story in

detail, explaining how biographies can shed light on cultural changes produced by the event.

Events may produce social and cultural changes, as is well-established in the social sciences. Not only long routine processes, but something as quick and intensive, such as “events” influence the world around us. According to the classical sociological theories of events, they transform social structure, create new identities and drive political newness. Revolutions and mass protest movements are the quintessence of events; most of theories of events in social science were created based on the analysis of movements and uprisings. Social movements *may* produce new identities, new social ties and relationships and, most important, a new cycle of mobilization. But they may fail as well.

During last ten years, dozens of protest movements happened in the world: the wave of Arab revolutions, protests in Southern Europe, and the occupation of Wall Street, to mention just a few. While some of them have led to the visible changes in the political landscape (such as, for example, the creation of Podemos party out of the mass movements in Spain), others seemingly have failed. However, even those movements that look as if they are unsuccessful may produce less apparent but not less important changes. This dissertation proposes one of the explanations of how changes in political culture are being possible as a result of social movement that seemingly failed.

The event dealt with in this monograph, the so-called “For Fair Election” (FFE) movement, is the biggest since the 1990s nationwide mass mobilization in contemporary Russia. In 2011-12 the cycle of large political rallies against electoral fraud took place in Russia. The first rallies involved up to 100 000 people in Moscow and a somewhat less in Saint-Petersburg, but the amount of protesters declined rapidly during 2013-14 because of repressions from the state, the failure of opposition to create functional coordination structures and number of other reasons. The movement was also criticized by both participants and experts for its inability to articulate clear political goals and a program. Despite the fact that the event of the “For Fair Elections” protest did not lead directly to the visible changes in the political regime and did not achieve its goals (which were never clearly stated), it led to the important change in activist political culture in Russia within post-protest local activism.

This new local activism includes a number of local civic activists groups in Moscow and St. Petersburg organized by the former participant of the “For Fair Elections” rallies in the spring, 2012 and later – when nationwide protests began to decline. The members of such groups solved the problems of their municipal districts and neighborhoods, communicated with municipal authorities, and participated in local elections. Since 2012, such local activist groups have started to appear in Moscow and St. Petersburg, sometimes without any visible connection to each other and in a few years, almost every third of municipal district in both of Russia’s main cities had this kind of local group. Thus, this phenomenon is far from being incidental and parochial, and definitely deserves scholarly attention.

Outwardly, these local groups resemble numerous activist groups that were active before the “For Fair Elections” movement. However, the pre-protest local activism was deliberately “apolitical” and focused on concrete and small problem-solving, while the post-protest local activism combined oppositional politics and “real deeds” (which were basically specific actions, producing outcomes beneficial to society at large). Thus, on the one hand, this post-protest local activism reproduced the form of an apolitical urban activity of “small deeds” in a familiar “close to home” sphere. On the other hand, it gave this form political substance and meaning. This integration of opposite practices and meanings led to the emergence of the new politicized, activist culture. How did this change in activist political culture emerge out of the “For Fair Elections” movement, which was widely criticized for its political vagueness and uncertainty?

Social movement scholars usually study the transformations and the consequences of mass political events through the concept of cycles of protests. Analyzing how initial protest movements (the so-called “early risers”) produce other protest movements (the so-called “latecomers”), existing theories explain these transformations in two ways. First, they argue that “latecomers” inherit and routinize the most successful parts of the early risers’ repertoire and frames (Tarrow 1993, Snow and Benford 1988, della Porta 2013). Second, they argue that, especially in non-liberal political regimes, the “latecomers” concentrate on avoiding repressions (McAdam 1995, della Porta 2013). Thus, according to these theories, the most obvious explanation of why the protesters decided to create local activists groups after they took part in the national-scale rallies is the growing probability of repression. In other words, the fact that local activism seemed to be less risky made the protest movement change its scale. At the same time, specific features of local activism, including the politicized character of thinking and action within it, would be explained by the fact that the most successful elements of know-how invented during mass protests were routinized in long-term day-to-day local movements. However, both these explanations, while being very useful in the context they were created, do not work in the case of Russia. Moreover, this theoretical approach, in general, can be improved by looking at the activists’ early socialization. This is what the story of Victor, Tamara, Denis, and Kirill, told above, is meant to demonstrate. In other words, it is exactly the analysis of activist biographies that can help to explain how the new politicized forms of local activism in post-2011-2012 Russia became possible despite the politically vague protest movement.

The argument is developed in the monograph in the following way. In the first chapter, the main theoretical discussions in the fields of sociology of event, the political culture, the political socialization and the individual involvement into social movements are summarized and the gaps are identified and the goals and objectives of the research are formulated. The second chapter describes the methodology and data. Third chapter is devoted to the cultural and institutional context in which the “For Fair Elections” movement emerge how these factors contributed to the creation of new local groups. In the fourth chapter, the different biographical

pathways leading to the involvement in the “For Fair Elections” movement and then to the new local activism are introduced, showing that people with completely different experiences, know-how and visions can meet each other in local activist groups, thanks to the “For Fair Elections” event. The fifth chapter addresses the changes in the activist political culture that took place in the new local activism, and shows how attention to the activist biographies can explain these changes. In the sixth chapter, the main empirical findings of the research are summarized in a very condensed way, underlining their theoretical differences. The theoretical debates from the first chapter are highlighted, demonstrating how the empirical results may contribute to these debates.

Generally speaking, in this monograph, based upon the synthesis of existing theories of social movements studies, social events, and political socialization, a new approach to the analysis of social and cultural changes through the event is proposed. In order to fully explain social movement transformations and changes produced by an event, people’s biographies should be brought back into the analysis.

# **CHAPTER I. EVENT, BIOGRAPHY AND POLITICAL CULTURE: LITERATURE REVIEW**

This dissertation is in dialogue with various subfields in the social and political sciences. First, it is devoted to the emergence of a new type of activism emerging from the big nationwide protest movement; thus, it deals with the sociology of event and social movement studies. Second, the research emphasizes the mechanisms of recruitment in activism through the biographies; thus, the work is related to political socialization studies, life-story research and the analysis of careers. Third, the study looks at the change in activist political culture produced in local activism, and thus, deals with the political culture research area. This chapter introduces each of the subfields, identifies the gaps within them and situates the current research. Finally, on the basis of detected gaps in the literature, the main research questions are formulated.

The main theoretical argument in the dissertation is that a biography is the necessary (and missing in contemporary research) element that helps to explain how cultural changes can be produced by the event. Through socialization, different types of cultural dispositions, experiences and know-how are formed among different groups of people who are growing up and living in disjointed social worlds. These events may create unprecedented conditions that bring together these worlds and these different groups of people. Being closely tied to each other in pursuing a common goal, some of them are able to recombine their different visions and thinking, creating the new cultural “hybrid”. Thus, the biography is the tool scholars need to use in order to be able to see how different types of visions, experiences and know-how are developing, transferring from one place to another, combining and recombining and finally producing something new.

## ***1.1. Event and Biography***

In the following section of this chapter, a study of an event and a study of a biography are combined advantageously for both subfields. First, the sociology of event is introduced, showing how the outcomes of protest events are studied in social movement studies. Second, the micro-analysis of an event, including the analysis of an event’s influence on biographies, is shown, indicating that it is still not developed enough in the sociology of event. Two main but rarely intersected approaches to study political trajectories are considered and a proposal is made for the way to unite them. Third, an exact analysis of biography is explained, considering how it may contribute to the sociology of event, and vice versa.

### **1.1.1. Event and Social Movement Studies**

In his innovative research, William Sewell shows that big historical events usually have, as their consequences, the transformation of previous social structures (Sewell 1996). Analyzing the event of Bastille Storming in the French Revolution, he finds out that it finally led to reconstruction of the French political culture – articulation of new symbolic meanings, such as “nation”, “people’s sovereign will”, and “revolution”. Sewell defines an event through its transformative capacity, and an event, according to Sewell, is that which “results in a durable transformation of structures” (Sewell 1996: 844). Later Adam Moore corrects Sewell’s theory of events, arguing that an event can not only transform, but also reproduce social structures. He analyzes the occurrences during two days of violence in the Bosnian city Mostar in 2007 and shows that this event “reinforced the salience of ethnic division, foreclosing the possibility of a fundamental shift in social relation” (Moore 2011: 308). Thus, Moore claims, we should not define the “event” through the social change it produces, as Sewell does. “Unpredictable, potentially threatening, events are affective moments in time, experientially significant in their own right”, Moore insists (Moore 2011: 305).

Within social movement studies, the idea of a “transformative event” is widely discussed. It is well known that experience of repressions can sometimes function as a “transformative event”, leading to the new cycles of mobilization (McAdam 1995, Hess and Marin 2006), or that the new identities, social ties and relations can emerge as a consequences of mass movements (Tarrow 1993, Snow and Benford 1988, della Porta 2008, della Porta 2013). At the same time, protest movements can lead to the “rehabilitation” of a previous structure in a new form (Bosi and Davis 2017).

Starting with the classical works of Doug McAdam and Sidney Tarrow on the topic, scholars analyze the outcomes of big events in the sphere of protest politics in terms of the cycle of protest, where “early risers” may produce “latecomers” (Tarrow 1993, McAdam 1995). Nancy Whittier (2004), an American sociologist, makes a detailed literature review on the problem of the social movement’s consequences. She lists the ways defined by scholars of how big protest events may influence smaller movements that follow them. Thus, later movements can organize around the same grievances or by the same constituency as earlier ones; the frames and discourses of earlier movements can affect how later activists frame their issues; individuals from “latecomers” can adopt collective identities from “early risers”; “latecomers” can also borrow the repertoires of action from big protest events that happened earlier (Whittier 2004).

It is worthwhile to remark that most of the research dealing with the outcomes of big protest events’ is interested more in explaining reproduction mechanisms than in revealing the mechanisms of the creation of something new. For example, Suzanne Staggenborg (1998) analyzes the causes of the emergence of the women’s movement as a result of mass protests in 1960s-1970s in America. She argues that three sets of factors contributed to this process: former protest participants stayed active because they considered activism as helping to their personal development; the women’s movement received institutional support bigger than the “early riser” protests themselves; other influential social movement organizations

were also supported. Thus, Staggenborg shows that even if a big protest movement dies, it usually leaves a social movement as an outcome, which helps to develop smaller “latecomers” (Staggenborg 1998). Stephen Tuck (2008) poses similar question about black movement’s emergence on the wave of the same civic protests in America, but he basically explains this phenomenon by the fact of empowerment of black people during the “early riser” protest event. Meanwhile, the women’s movement studied by Staggenborg produced its own effects on late coming initiatives, as shown by David Meyer and Nancy Whittier (1994). This led to the emergence of the peace movement in 1980s: the latter adopted the feminist ideological frame, tactics and organizational structures of its predecessor. Many examples of how big protest events “deinstitutionalize existing beliefs, norms, and values embodied in extant forms, and establish new forms that instantiate new beliefs, norms and values” (Rao et al. 2000: 238) are given in the article of Hayagreeva Rao, Calvin Morrill and Mayer Zald. Unfortunately, however, listing all these intriguing examples, like the U.S. consumer movement leading to the movement for health care reform in the 1970's, they rather tell us about the sequence of events, rather than explain this sequence.

It should be noted that most of “early riser” protest movements mentioned above have influenced “latecomers” in a friendly environment: they were big and successful in achievement of some of their goals, and they empowered their participants. However, protest events in the context of an unfavorable political opportunity may lead to the emergence of movements’ followers as well, and very often, the later are more localized and narrow-framed movements. Thus, for example, Diana Fisher (2006) argues that the Global Justice movement in America was transformed into the movement against Bush’s administration after September 2001, as a result of the shrinking of the structure of the political opportunity. This argument is close to the famous argument of McAdam’s one: when the political opportunity structure shrinks, more localized spin-off movements usually emerge out of nationwide protest events, being a reaction on “political inopportunity” (McAdam 1995). As has been already stated above, McAdam (as well as Tarrow) believe that state repression plays a crucial role in the transformation of such a movement (McAdam 1995, della Porta 2013). According to current research, even within this unfavorable environment, “latecomers” tend to inherit the most successful parts of frames and a repertoire of action from “early risers” (Tarrow 1993, Snow and Benford 1988). Thus, it is clear that reproduction is the concern of most of researchers on cycle of protest.

However, a few researchers highlight the newness which may be produced by big protest events in an unfavorable political environment, and, among them, Jeffrey Juris’s work deserves special attention. Studying the Occupy Wall Street movement and its consequences, Juris (2012) compares it to the Global Justice movement that existed earlier in America. The logic of networking prevailed in the Global Justice movement: it was based on listservs and websites as coordination tools; and it can be described as a network of networks or a movement of movements because it united already existing, collective actors. On the other side, the Occupy Wall Street

movement was organized on the principle of the logic of aggregation: new social media and not listservs were important and actors with different backgrounds came together as individuals. Juris describes OWS social composition in a following way: “These individuals may subsequently forge a collective subjectivity through the process of struggle, but it is a subjectivity that is under the constant pressure of disaggregation into its individual components - hence, the importance of interaction and community building within physical spaces” (Juris 2012: 266). That is why the Occupy Wall Street protesters (as well as the FFE protesters) did not make any concrete demands: these were not political views, but a physical space that united different individuals. However, after OWS was broken up, many of their participants have created smaller working groups dealing with particular agenda, and these groups tried to unite networking logic and the logic of aggregation. Juris formulates many insights which are important for this research, but he does seem to develop them enough. For example, he tells the story of the creation of local groups out of a big protest event, and observes the new ways of doing politics that emerged, not just by inheriting and reproducing the “early riser’s” repertoire of action, but also by uniting opposite elements of this repertoire into a single frame. But what Juris is doing is telling the story, not doing the generalization proposed above, and not trying to theorize this phenomenon. Moreover, he shows that the logic of aggregation within OWS has led to the actual aggregation of individuals with different backgrounds in the same physical space. As shown below, this exact fact was crucial for the creation of new local groups out of the “For Fair Elections” protest in Russia. However, noticing this same phenomenon in case of the OWS movement, Juris does not analyze in detail how and why the OWS became attractive for individuals that are so different (the only explanation he proposes – because of the specific character of the new media – does not seem to be enough), and how this aggregation contributed to the creation of smaller working groups after the OWS itself failed. Meanwhile, the literature has already shown that “movement veterans continue to participate in social movements at greater rates than nonveterans. In doing so, they can carry the lessons of earlier movements into the other movements that they join. They thus carry the political lessons and perspectives of the movement that shaped their enduring collective identity into other movements” (Whittier 2004: 541). Thus, this dissertation takes into account all these insights from existing literature – possible ways of continuity between protest events and their “latecomers”, effects of aggregation, and biographical effects. Based on the results of empirical research, it tries to create a theoretical approach that explains how big political protest events and their effects can be studied through the micro-level of biographies.

### **1.1.2. Event and its Micro-Analysis: Biography**

Current research on events (and by ‘event’ here I mean protest/political event) and biographies is not sufficient. A major part of this

research is devoted to the biographical determination of movement participation. Scholars show that understanding of previous biographical experience of movements' participant is necessary for explaining an event itself. This type of research is discussed in detail in the section 1.1.3, "Activist Biography and Two Approaches to Study It." At the same time, the research on how an event may influence biography is far less developed.

There are some insights of how movement participation may influence the personal trajectories of activists through the subjective meaning it has for them. For example, movement participation confirms that there are others who think and feel as oneself and allows the activists to feel as a "part of something bigger and transcendent" (Mora 2016: 31). Farah Ramzy, in her persuasive analysis of the narrative of one student activist after the Egyptian revolution, demonstrates that the girl presents the revolution "as a beginning of a process of personal change that involves taking an active interest in things that go beyond her individual concerns" – and "she translated her "want to do something" into many different things that led her to becoming a member of a political party, then to join the student union, and later to leave the first, followed by the latter" (Ramzy 2016: 7). Chazli (2012) shows how the event of Egyptian revolution of 2011 created a new social group – "depoliticized" people became "revolutionaries." Those who came to the protest were interested in politics before but they never imagined themselves actually protesting. However, two main factors, such as politicization of friendship circles and sequences of micro-events (like an accident meeting of protesters in the neighborhood: "I went out to buy a bit of hashish, and... I saw that the protests were actually there, I could actually see them ... and I decided to go and take part in the major demonstration of Friday," Chazli 2012: 92), brought the people who skeptical of any political action to the Tahrir square. But it was the communication at the Tahrir square itself – political conversations, political jokes, the feeling of unity, etc – which "constituted a form of socialization, and through this socialization, the performance of new social norms" (Chazli 2012: 99). Thus, not only biographical experience of the protesters may explain the revolution, but also an event of a revolution itself may show how the protesters' thinking and vision have been changed afterward.

A few research discuss how eventful experience may change not just people's world-views, but their actual/factual trajectories. The relationship between an event and continuity/change patterns in biographies is not established: it seems from the literature that a movement participation might both completely change people's lives and also lead to the continuation of the old experience in a new form. For example, Maffi in her research on feminist NGO created after Tunisian revolution, shows that the participation in an NGO for the women she studies was a direct consequence of the event of the revolution and would be impossible without it. At the same time, all of these women used professional skills acquired long before revolution in their activist work in the NGO, and for some of them, NGO-experience became a chance to realize the dream they had before the revolution. Thus, both "old" experience and know-how and "new"

ones emerged out of the event, contributing, somehow, to women's participation in a "latecomer" movement (Maffi 2016). In order to conceptualize the connection between "new" and "old" elements of biographical experiences after an event better, this work proposes leaving the sociology of the event aside, and draw our focus onto social movement studies.

Explaining people's long term participation in activism through their biographies, social movement scholars use similar opposition between "continuity" (Milesi et al 2006, Linden and Klandermans 2006), "process" (Andrews 1991), and "socialization" (de Witte 2006) on the one hand, and "conversion" (Andrews 1991, Blee 2002, Linden and Klandermans 2006, Hart 2010) and "resocialization" (della Porta 1995) on the other. The involvement through the "continuity" implies that a person has (or thinks that he/she has) some dispositions to activism formed during socialization, and civic/political participation is (or is perceived as) the result of such dispositions. Within classical sociological theory, this process is called "secondary socialization" (Berger and Luckmann 1967). According to Berger and Luckmann (1967), during secondary socialization, a person does not feel strong emotional attachment to socializing agents, the socialization itself has no inevitable character (a person can choose), and the present is interpreted in the way it should be, in consistent relationship with the past. For example, Milesi, Chirumbolo and Catellani (2006) study Italian right-wing activism and show that far-rights are mostly coming from fascists or conservative families, and reconstruct their commitment as a heritage they had received from their families.

The "Conversion" model presupposes that a person becomes involved in activism "in spite of his/herself", and he or she does not have any particular dispositions to it (de Witte 2006). In social theory, this is usually called "alternation" or "resocialization" (Berger and Luckmann 1967). "Alternation" partly resembles primary socialization because the reality is radically reinterpreted after it. That is why strong emotional attachment for resocializing agents and institutions is important. As a result, a person usually denies biography before alternation "in toto" ("when I have had bourgeois consciousness...") (Berger and Luckmann 1967). For example, della Porta (1995), in her research on radical clandestine organizations in Italy and Germany, finds out that newcomers firstly resocialize in political counterculture of radical groups, and only after they become the followers of the political ideology.

While these two models usually are used by scholars in order to explain the routine process of involvement in activism, here they are applied to study involvement through the political event, thus going back to the sociology of the event and bridging these two approaches. According to a few research projects mentioned above that try to study an event's effect on biographies, both continuity and conversion occur as a result of eventful experience (Maffi 2016, Ramzy 2016). Predispositions to activism (and, thus, continuity with previous experience) are seen as a necessary but not sufficient condition for long-term activist involvement (Maffi 2016). Thus, an "eventful experience" is needed as something that "converts" people and

makes them involved in other long-term, time-consuming and sometimes risky projects (Ramzy 2016). This dissertation, looks more carefully at exactly how continuity/conversion models can be applied to the study of biographies and events, and as a result, propose a different approach to deal with an event and a biography.

Thus, this dissertation deals with an event's effects on people's biographies through the problem of continuity/conversion, thus bridging the sociology of event and micro-level social movement studies. The relationship between an event and continuity/change patterns in people's trajectories is not well established in the literature. In other words, the "For Fair Elections" movement could promote further civic participation of some of its members by turning their trajectories in a totally new direction, or by reinforcing their previous dispositions. One of the questions of this research is how exactly and why did the "For Fair Elections" movement influence the biographies of some of its participants in such a way that they became involved in long-term local activism. Answering this question, contributes to the sociology of an event through the connection of its basic insights with the micro-level analysis of activists' biographies. Different approaches to the micro-level analysis of activists' biographies are discussed below in more detail.

### **1.1.3. Activist Biography and Two Approaches to Study It**

Studying people's involvement into new local activism after a mass protest movement through their biographies brings us to the field of socialization research. Scholars widely study the process of individuals' politicization and political involvement as a part of two different and rarely intersecting academic fields (which means that such scholars publish their articles in different journals and do not meet each other at the conferences): political socialization research and social movement studies.

Researchers in the political socialization field show that people acquire political attitudes in early childhood, adolescence, and adulthood (Marsh 1971, Jennings and Niemi 1974, Niemi and Sobieszek 1977). Scholars who study political learning reveal how different social institutes influence the political attitudes of people. For example, in "*Political Character of Adolescence*" (1974) Jennings and Niemi show that the family influences party preferences more than peer groups, as parents do not usually think consciously about the political education of their children and do not provide them with alternative political points of view. Niemi and Sobieszek (1977) argue against this, claiming that it is political discussions at college that influence the political attitudes of people, and this effect is even stronger than the effect of special classes in secondary school devoted to political participation and democracy.

Researchers have found that it is not only specific political attitudes (for example, more right-wing or more left-wing values) that are acquired during the growing-up process, but also more general orientation towards public participation (Sherkat and Blocker 1994). The ability to participate

can also be transferred “from the more limited sphere of participation in non-political decisions to the larger one of participation in politics” (Almond and Verba 1989: 284). Using the data gathered within the limits of empirical research on political attitudes in five nations classified as democratic, Almond and Verba (1989) show that there is a connection between the perceived ability to participate in family/school and the perceived ability to participate in politics. Flanagan and Galloway confirm the results of this research by showing that the civic competence of adolescents is formed in the family, “where adolescents test waters of independence, disagreeing with parent’s opinion, learning to question the wisdom of adult’s point of view, and giving their own spin of issues” (Flanagan and Galloway 1995). Consequently, beliefs about the importance of civic participation, together with personal issues for participation, are the primary motives for young people’s civic involvement (Ballard 2014).

Political learning as a process may occur in different ways. Some authors argue that observational learning, that is, the observation and repetition of others’ views and behavior, is the primary mechanism of political learning in adolescence. Teenagers acquire political attitudes by observing their parents’, teachers’, and peers’ behavior (Jennings and Niemi 1974, Niemi and Sobieszek 1977, Plaff 2009). Other authors emphasize the importance of political learning through action: practicing decision-making in other spheres (such as family or school), children learn the principles of political decision-making (Almond and Verba 1989).

Nevertheless, political socialization scholars do not pay enough attention to socialization into movement politics, and most of them are over-reliant “on survey research, focussing on a narrow set of indicators, many of which are tied to voting”. Thus, the dynamic nature of the political socialization process is also rarely captured (Petrovic, Stekelenburg and Klandermans 2014, Sapiro 2004, Owen 2008).

By comparison, social movement scholars usually study individual political involvement in its dynamics. Researchers emphasize not only the factual chronology of activists’ trajectories, but also the structure of the stories they tell and the meaningful explanations they propose because the subjective justification of protest involvement is inseparable from involvement itself (Sacks 1989, Andrews 1991, Polletta 2006, Milesi et al. 2006, Hart 2010).

In his classical research on French academia in the late sixties, Pierre Bourdieu (1988) explains the even of May revolution of 1968 by the specificity of biographical experience of its participants. He shows that most of the revolutionary leaders, who represented themselves as regular students, actually received a “political education” in student unions and youth parts of political parties or groups. In these organizations, the future revolutionaries acquired specific competencies which were necessary for making May revolution possible. May revolution of 1968 actually often became an object of analyzes for scholars who tried to determine what kind of people took part in it and made it possible. Thus, for example, Kenneth Keniston (1968) in his famous research on young radicals critically considers two popular hypotheses – that the revolutionaries were basically

fighting with their bourgeois families, and, alternatively, that they acquired their radical attitudes in politicized families. Keniston argues that both hypotheses are inadequate, and the complex sequence of conflicts and crises led radicalized young people and made them revolutionaries (Keniston 1968). As Molly Andrews shows, people may radicalize and become involved in political movements as a result of understanding their personal circumstances (experience of oppression) or by “applying intellectual, abstract concepts to situations which did not directly impinge upon their own circumstances” (Andrews 1991).

Biographical experience of participants may also influence events by determining the narratives participants use to frame a movement and to create shared identity (Fine 2018). Experience of protesters may produce narrative, “which in turn promotes identification, which then facilitates collective activity” (Fine 2018: 13).

In “Extreme Right Activists in Europe” Bert Klandermans and Nona Mayer (2006) collect the papers explaining biographical causes of right activism in several European countries. Thus, in Italy, most of the right-wing activists reconstructed commitment to fascism as a heritage they had received from their parents. Interestingly, even if their families actually had just conservative or even left political attitudes, the activists still described them as the source of a positive view on fascism. Not only the actual transmission of attitudes, but the perception of this transmission was an important driving force to politics (Milesi et al. 2006). In France, two groups of people with different trajectories were involved in right-wing activism. On the one hand, these were young people came from right-wing and conservative families, and thus inherited right-wing attitudes during early socialization. On the other hand, these were the people from all other families for whom it was important just to be “against something”, and the right-wing culture of solidarity gave them the way “to be against” (Lafont 2006). De Witte, when explaining biographical determinants of right-wing activism in the Flemish part of Belgium, proposes similar but not exactly the same classification. He argues that one part of right-wing activists came from right-wing and conservative families and thus inherited their political values through the socialization process (which is similar to Lafont’s argument about France). At the same time, another part of the activists was involved to right-wing politics because of personal deprivation during life-course – for example, they could have a low salary and start to blame immigrants in that (de Witte 2006).

Activists biographies were studied in Russia as well. Thus, Elena Zdravomyslova and Anna Temkina, Russian gender scholars, explored women’s involvement in politics and social movements. In her research on feminist movement in the early nineties in Russia, Zdravomyslova (1996) reconstructs collective biography of female feminist activists. She argues that it was a discrepancy between a patriarchal culture of dissident circles young women were part of and their own active role in family and school socialization which gave them feminist consciousness. Temkina (1996), studying a women pathway to professional politics, alternatively, shows three different trajectories, leading women to local parliament. These are: a

continuation of a political career for those who were interested in politics since young ages, a continuation of a professional career for those who occupied high administrative positions in both state and private companies, and a “female career” for those who came to politics to support their men.

In social movement studies, Donatella della Porta’s and Doug McAdam’s research are still considered to be the paradigmatic research on individual involvement into movements, despite the fact that other researchers explored this problem as well (and some of them are mentioned above). Studying the individual involvement and life-stories of activists as a part of her comparative research on radical left-wing clandestine organizations in the late 1960s, della Porta (1995) finds that both German and Italian activists decided to participate in collective action, first of all because of moral motives (they wanted to help people who needed help), and only after that did they acquire ideological knowledge and reasoning. The political networks they were involved in became more and more totalizing, political experience defined every aspect of activists’ private lives, and they gradually started to justify more violent actions. Doug McAdam (1990), in his research on the Freedom Summer campaign in the US, reveals that organizers of the campaign were successful in attracting well-to-do people: the majority of the participants came from high-income families and high classes, they graduated from the best American universities, lived in North America, and less than ten percent of them were black. They were also “biographically available” for participation. In other words, they were “freed from the demands of family, marriage, and full-time employment” (McAdam 1990: 44) and integrated into the networks of other civic organizations. Comparing those applicants who eventually participated in the Freedom Summer campaign and those who did not, McAdam claims that biographical availability and integration into the networks of other civic organizations matter to the involvement much more than “political”, “ideological” or “moral” attitudes (McAdam 1990).

Despite the fact that della Porta and McAdam study different models of collective action (left-wing terrorist organizations on the one hand, and non-violent civic campaign on the other hand), both of them describe the general socio-economic background of the activists and then explore, in detail, a dynamic of involvement starting from the activists’ first contact with the activist world and finishing with their full involvement in the movement. Consequently, what is usually called “political socialization” by scholars, namely, “the gradual development of the individual’s own particular and idiosyncratic views of the political world, is the process by which a given society’s norms and behavior are internalized” (Fillieule 2013) and is not the focus of the research of della Porta and McAdam. It is, moreover, not the focus of most of the works in social movement studies, as we could see above (with some exceptions outside of SMS such as Kenniston or Zdravomyslova and Temkina). Igor Petrovic and Bert Klandermans (2014) make a similar criticism when discussing the weak connections between political socialization and social movements studies. They claim that even if social movement scholars study “political socialization”, they rarely refer to it explicitly. However, the more precise way to frame it is that

social movement scholars may use the concept “political socialization” explicitly, but what they mean by it does not coincide with the conventional definition of the term. For example, della Porta (1995) speaks about “political socialization”, referring to the process starting only at the moment when people face an activist world. Thus, for many social movement scholars, socialization becomes “political” only when people face politics directly in their daily life; that is, when they are involved in a protest movement or become the members of a political party.

Thus, political socialization scholars reveal that people’s political socialization starts with early childhood, but they rarely explore this process in dynamics, while social movement researchers ignore early socialization of activists, but carefully examine the dynamics of involvement. In order to benefit from both these approaches and to overcome their limitations at the same time, this research proposes the analysis of activists’ involvement based on the concept of “activist career”. This concept, developed by Fillieule (2010) and borrowed from the Chicago school of sociological tradition, is the instrument to study how individuals’ dispositions that are formed during the whole socialization process work in dynamic and finally lead to involvement in activism.

#### **1.1.4. Biography in Dynamics: the Chicago School of Sociology and the Concept of an Activist Career**

The term “career” was firstly introduced in the Chicago School of Sociology. Robert Park, William Thomas, Florian Znaniecki, and Clifford Shaw began to use a life history methodology and to study people’s lives in dynamics, but it was Everett Hughes who started to use the term “career” explicitly (Barley 1989). The concept of career was important for Hughes because it allowed him to study both the objective development of people’s lives in contemporary societies and their subjective understanding of the meaning and sense of their lives. Objectively, “career” is a successive change of individual’s statuses; the more a given society is structured, the more rigid and determinate are individual careers. Subjectively, career is “the moving perspective in which the person sees his life as a whole and interprets the meaning of his various attributes, actions and the things that happen to him” (Hughes 1937: 410). This objective/subjective duality of career is the main aspect of the concept. Duality was important not only for Hughes, but for all of his followers, and for the Chicago sociology tradition in general. It is also important to understand that the “career” for Hughes and his followers refers to the set of similar trajectories; it is not individual but collective and social (in the sense that it is not only the choice of individuals but is partly determined by society) phenomenon. As Andrew Abbot (2001) explained later, “one cannot write the history of an individual profession because that profession is too dependent on what other professions around it are doing”; there are always rules for the field.

The main problem Hughes (1951) was interested in was the meaning and the role of work in our society. He emphasized the crucial role of work

in the constitution of people's selves. Work is one of the criteria we use to judge a person and a person uses it to judge him or herself. At the same time, Hughes (1937) pointed out that work was not the only sphere where people can have a career: we can observe careers in family life, and in religious, patriotic or civic organization. Institutions, Hughes insisted, were only "the form in which the collective behavior and collective action of people go on". A study of careers, thus, "may be expected to reveal the nature of the "working constitution" of a society" (Hughes 1937: 413).

The followers of Hughes continued to develop the notion of "career" in their work. The most famous among them are the research of Howard Becker (1963) on deviants, the study of Erving Goffman (1961) on mental patients, and the collective research of Becker, Geer, Hughes and Strauss (1976) on medical students. Both Becker and Goffman used the term "career" to conceptualize people's objective/subjective trajectories outside the sphere of professional occupations.

Howard Becker's "*Outsiders*" (1963) is devoted to the careers of marihuana users and dance musicians. Becker defined both these groups as deviants and discussed the so-called "deviant career"<sup>1</sup>. This type of career generally consists of two steps: the first is "the commission of a nonconforming act, an act that breaks some particular set of rules" (Becker 1963: 26); the second is the learning "to participate in a subculture organized around the particular deviant activity" (Becker 1963: 32). What is important here is the idea that a "career" is organized by "steps" or "stages" separated by some "turning points", when not only objective statuses but also self-conceptions of individuals change. Analyzing the "deviant careers" of marihuana users, Becker identified three stages: learning to use the proper smoking technique, learning to point the effects out to himself and consciously connect them with having smoked marihuana, and learning to enjoy the effects he has just learned to experience (Becker 1963: 47-59). Research on dance musicians, on the other hand, demonstrates clearly how the changes in self-conception are connected with the movement within the status hierarchy. Becker found that when musicians started to consider themselves not as artists but as instrumentalists, they became able to play the music people wanted to listen to, and this change in self-understanding opened "the way for movement into the upper levels of the job hierarchy, creating the conditions in which complete success is possible" (Becker 1963: 113). One of the important conclusions Becker made in his "*Outsiders*" was that "instead of the deviant motives leading to the deviant behavior, it is the other way around; in time, deviant behavior produces the deviant motivation" (Becker 1963: 43); or, as Becker wrote elsewhere, sometimes "the person becomes aware that he is committed only at some point of change and seems to have made the commitment without realizing it" (Becker 1960: 38). The last crucial idea to be highlighted in Becker's research is that career does not necessarily presuppose hierarchy. It can be horizontal as well. Thus, the careers of school teachers in Chicago is the

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<sup>1</sup> The term "deviant" could be criticized as a normative one. However, taking into account this criticism, here it is still used in the way Becker did, in order to show how he conceptualized the concept of career.

prominent example of horizontal movement: people change one school for another looking for a better place to work, but at the same time, they preserve their occupational position (Becker 1952). All these ideas – objective/subjective duality of career, its organization by stages, motive following action, and the horizontal aspect of career – create the basis for the research on career for the next generation of researchers.

Erving Goffman, in his *“Asylums”* (1961), was interested in a very specific aspect of a “career” – it was what he called the “moral career of the mental patient”. He explicitly pointed out that his primary focus was the changes in the individual his/her self. Nevertheless, the structure of his work is typical for the Chicago school tradition of careers research: he defined and analyzed the stages of “moral career”, introduced the notion of “career contingencies” (certain social conditions which trigger the start of “patient career”) and showed that these social contingencies were a much more important reason for hospitalization than the “mental illness” itself (Goffman 1961). At the same time, his focus on the patients themselves allowed him to find out that at the second stage of their careers, patients not just changed their subjectivities but partly lost their selves, which then came under the control of the asylums (Goffman 1961). Studying people with stigma, Goffman (1986) also conceptualized their experience through the notion of “moral career”. He showed that all stigmatized people had several types of similar “moral career”. That is, their self-conceptions changed similarly. Thus, “career” is not limited to work, though it “requires a social backdrop against which movement could be gauged” (Barley 1989).

Developing the classical understanding of “career”, Andrew Abbot (2001) proposes the notion of a “turning point”, which refers to the crucial moments in developing people’s careers. According to Abbot, “what defines the turning point is the fact that the turn that takes place within it contrasts with a relative straightness outside” (Abbot 2001: 89). For example, a successful scientific career starts with enrollment at an elite college, which is a strongly coercive trajectory. However, it is followed by chaotic turning points when a graduate student enters the job market – until he/she finds a job and moves to a new more or less stable trajectory, for example, becomes an assistant professor. The turning point can be defined only post-factum: we can not be sure that the job market entry will be a turning point for a particular person. As well, the turning point is not necessarily perceived as such by a person his/herself, it is rather a social fact which can be documented objectively. Big social events may produce such turning points, but not necessarily need to do so. For example, a person’s biography can be radically changed after her participation in a protest movement (for example, he/she can be imprisoned or became a part of a political party), but it can also stay the same (for example, he/she took part in a few rallies and then came back to their ordinary lives).

The notion of “career” developed in the Chicago School of Sociology is widely used by other social scholars. Thus, Robert Stebbins (1970) shows how objective and subjective careers are linked. There are cases when an objective approach cannot predict a person’s behavior because his/her understanding of the situation differs from the common one. Here the

notion of a subjective career as a number of predispositions that result in a particular view of the world helps to explain his/her attitudes and behavior. For example, as Douglas Hall and Dawn Chandler (2005) show, the subjective feeling of success in one's professional career can drive its objective outcomes even within socially unfavorable circumstances. Later Laurie Cohen and Mary Mallon (2001) used another subjective approach in their research on freelance careers: they analyzed how people themselves frame their career choices. Among other things, they found that interviewees themselves usually pay attention to the process of retrospective sense-making ("my wife could tell my story in a different way") or relate their careers to the features of the social structure.

"Career" usually refers not only to a set of professional trajectories, as the Chicago school sociologists claim. For example, Robin Humphrey (1993) is interested in the continuity/discontinuity problem in the social careers of old people: he found that both those who are involved in the surrounding community and those who are socially isolated from it may experience continuity and "career breaks" in their lives. Similarly, Gill Kirton (2006) studied the union careers of female workers. Muriel Darmon's research (2009) is devoted to the "deviant career" of conversion to anorexia: she describes the four stages of such a career and highlights the role of the class factor in the process of conversion – the set of anorexia's practices and orientations resonates with the practices and orientations clearly identified with middle- and upper-class status.

Based on the Chicago school of sociology, Olivier Fillieule (2010) introduces the notion of an "activist career", which is central for this dissertation. As Fillieule claims, the term "activist career" helps to grasp the context of "the permanent dialectic between individual history, social institutions and more" (Fillieule 2010: 4). It is an instrument allowing the examination of how political socialization at the level of biography, social and political context and peculiarities of organization influences people's long-term commitment to it. Through the concept of "activist career", we can understand "how, at each biographical stage, the attitudes and behaviors of activists are determined by past attitudes and behaviors" (Fillieule 2010: 11).

There is still only a small amount of research available in English that uses an activist career as a working tool. Katrine Fangen (1999) analyzes the careers leading to involvement in the Norwegian radical nationalist subculture. She defines several factors (such as an experience of marginalization, a feeling of belonging to the working class culture, and a search for a meaningful community), which are rather "the conditions of possibility" than determinants of nationalist participation. Julie Pagis (2010) studies how religious commitment could be politicized, interviewing the May '68 activists with religious backgrounds. She shows the crucial role of wars (Algerian, Vietnamese) in initiating moving from a humanist religious critique to a Marxist critique of capitalism, and claims that the activist conversion occurs as a rupture in terms of worldview and as continuity in terms of actual practices. Traini's (2012) research explains how activist careers leading to the conversion to vegetarianism unfold in stages.

He defines four ideal types of such careers and shows that the representatives of all of them first start to participate in the animal rights struggle and only then acquire the vegetarian identity.

Thus, in European (and partly American) societies, where civic and political institutions are strong, there are more or less clear “career scripts” – “institutionally rather than individually determined programs” (Arthur et al. 1999: 42) – leading to the activist involvement. This involvement can occur through participation in school parliaments, student activism on campus, religious or animal rights commitment, local elections, and so forth. There were no such scripts in contemporary Russia since the collapse of the USSR because there were no stable civic and political institutions which could “program” them. That is why it is important to study how activist careers began to be formed shortly before the “For Fair Elections” protest and how they led to participation in a new type of civic activism after and under the influence of the event of the “For Fair Elections” movement.

The study of the biographies of activists who participated in the “For Fair Elections” movement and switched to local activism through the concept of activist career connects two rarely intersecting approaches – political socialization research and social movement studies – and thus to fill the gaps in both of them. Moreover, the dissertation contributes to the research on political biographies and socialization as it shows how “eventful” experience may intervene with routinely formed biographical dispositions and how new stable dispositions can be created through an event. In other words, it reconciles continuity/routine and conversion/change patterns within the biography. Finally, this research contributes to the sociology of event. While we know from the literature that an event may change/create the new identities, symbols, cultural meanings, and that an event should influence people’s biographies as well, we do not really know how these two dimensions are connected. This dissertation argues that biographies can be used as a tool to study cultural changes through an event. In the following, the field of political culture research is described and its gaps are identified.

## ***1.2. Local Activism, Political Culture and “Group Style”***

In this section, the field of political culture research is introduced and situated Russia in the current international debate. Thus, the specificity of the empirical case is discussed in this section. First, the section describes how international scholars conceptualize local activism in its opposition to “politics”, defining four different ways or logics of the connection “local” and “political” in local activism used in scholarly debates. Second, how these logics depend on political culture they developed is covered, familiarizing the reader with what political culture is and how it has been studied. Third, logic local activism in Russia followed is described and how this logic has been changed after the nationwide protest movement is traced, referring to the research literature as well. Finally, the section argues that the concept of

political culture is too broad to fully express the specific features of this change, and that the pragmatic concept of group style can be useful here.

### 1.2.1. Local Activism vs Politics

Local activism (or even civic activism, in general) is usually opposed to political activism, both by researchers and by the activists themselves. In the literature, we can find several ways of conceptualization of such opposition – in other words, scholars define several logics of how local activists deal with “politics” (meaning here activists’ own understanding of what “politics” is). Analyzing the literature, four such logics can be defined.

Within the first logic, *local activists oppose their activities as authentic and sincere to dirty and dishonest politics*. For example, Elizabeth Bennett and her colleagues (2013) claim that contemporary American local activism is characterized by the tendency of “disavowing politics”. In their research, these scholars found that the people involved in the community’s problem solving (such as the struggle against pollution in the neighborhoods) do not define their activity as a political one. These activists grow up within the culture where politics is stigmatized; they do not want to be associated with “dirty politics”. That is why they try to keep a distance from it. Similarly, Eeva Luhtakallio (2012) shows that local activists in Helsinki prefer not to be associated with politics and present themselves as “experts” rather than as “activists”. Luhtakallio writes, describing their reaction to one of the group member’s public speech as a communist:

“Sometimes, after the meeting, activists would refer to the issue [“political” character of one of group member’s public speech – S.E.] in smaller groups showing signs of frustration and fatigue. These reactions were quite similar to how they reacted to ‘politicking’ in general: as something possibly hindering their cause.” (Luhtakallio 2012)

The second logic implies *the avoiding of politics in public communications by activists as a strategy*. It is based on the same assumption: politics is perceived as something dirty and corrupt in society. However, if in the first logic the activists do not really want to be involved in any kind of “political” activity, within the second one they do politics but do not want to be *perceived* as political activists. That is why they usually prefer to present their activity as ‘close-to-home problem solving’. Thus, Nina Eliasoph (1996), describing the practices of communication among activists struggling against a local toxic incinerator in the USA, shows that these people usually raise the issue of public good during their organizational meetings. Many of them are veteran activists who care about the general political situation and have chosen this local issue to struggle with, only because they find it illustrates the general principle of how corrupt authority works. Nevertheless, in the media, these people “present themselves as panicked “moms” and self-interested property owners” (Eliasoph 1996: 273)

putting their personal interest (even if they do not have it at all) as the most important. They know that this is the only way to get public approval. Sometimes local activists strategically avoid politics in order to be able to get more of resources they need. For example, Josh Pacewicz (2015) in his research on community leaders' involvement, shows that community leaders have not participated in party politics since the 1980s. At that time, Pacewicz explains, neoliberal reforms took place in the USA, promoting "a shift from a community arena characterized by locally embedded resources to one characterized by competitive resources" (Pacewicz 2015: 829); thus, community leaders were transformed from "fighters" to "partners" who try to collaborate with different political forces in order to receive more resources and not with being associated with any particular one.

Some researchers, such as, for example, Eliasoph, are skeptical towards such strategic usage of "close-to-home" rhetoric: even if activists practice it in order to be more empowered, in reality, they help the American public sphere to grow away. The very format of official institutions forces activists to "speak for themselves" and not for the public good. The only way for activists to change this situation, Eliasoph claims, is to resist playing by these rules and to create the public sphere by themselves. Instead of doing this, local activists adopt the practices that official institutions impose on them, devaluing public participation itself (Eliasoph 1996, 1997).

The third logic of local activists' dealing with politics that researchers define is the *gradual development of political thinking and practices through local problem-solving*. This is the idea which was described by Alexis de Tocqueville (2006) long ago: the Americans learn to be good citizens participating in decision-making and problem-solving process at the local level: this is how American democracy works. In their research on a local activist campaign against a bridge construction in one Italian valley Donatella della Porta and Gianni Piazza (2003) describe a similar process: the activists start to participate in the campaign because of their personal interest as local dwellers, but then they become more and more involved in the political debates and gradually switch from discourse of valley protection to a discourse on democracy protection. Paul Lichterman (1996), in his "*Search for Political Community*" book, also shows that in some cases, the cultures of self-fulfillment and individualism may foster people's commitment to politics, including "a strong critique of selfishness and acquisitiveness" (Lichterman 1996: 4) and finally leading to the creation of a political community. Lichterman calls such form of involvement "personalized commitment... that emphasizes individual voices without sacrificing the common good for private needs" (Lichterman 1996: 4). According to Eliasoph (2011), most of the volunteer groups in the US are based on this principle – the organizers suppose that young people will acquire the skills of independent thinking and problem solving through volunteering, and thus, will grow up as politically active citizens. Nevertheless, this principle does not usually work in practice: for example, children from poor families do not really learn to solve problems and help others. Rather, they perceive themselves as a "social problem" and think

that volunteering saves them from drug using or alcohol drinking. The organizers try to avoid conflicts and do not have enough time to discuss the issues they work with – and, thus, they are not able to stimulate the future political participation of activists.

Finally, the fourth logic of how local activists may relate themselves to “politics” is the most rarely detected in empirical studies, but still it should be described here. Within this logic, *activists see no difference between what they do and what politics is*. They do not only try to solve some concrete problems but also try to enjoy the very process of participation that they directly relate to *political* struggle with *political* enemies. Eeva Luhtakallio (2012), in her comparative research on local activism in Finland and France, found that the public performances of political views are essential for French local groups. She tells an illustrative story based on her fieldwork experience of how a female French activist refused to buy cigarettes in local tobacco store because of sexists and the conservative political views of the store’s owner. Luhtakallio concludes:

“The Lyonnais activists were prone to generalize issues touching them on a very personal level to public, politicized matters – be it the man who sells you cigarettes larding them with sexist remarks, the violent police officer evicting you from a squat, or the street you live on being monitored by video cameras day and night. ... I have lived all my life in Helsinki, mainly in four parts of town, and have never had a clue about the voting habits of a neighborhood salesperson, or for that matter, anyone else. My interlocutors in Helsinki did not make this point either, and seemed instead to detach their political activities somewhat more from their personal lives than activists did in Lyon.” (Luhtakallio 2012).

All four of the logics described above deserve an explanation in themselves. Why do local activists in France claim that they do politics, local activists in Finland present themselves rather as experts in the issue, and their counterparts in America use the language of “concerned parents” speaking about the same problem toxic incineration or park demolition? Scholars usually explain these differences by referring to the differences in political culture.

### **1.2.2. Political Culture**

From the very beginning, cultures have been conceptualized through the “values” and “interests” people share, but contemporary research on culture are critical towards this theoretical approach. Ann Swidler (1986) makes the most straightforward arguments in such a criticism. She reveals a debate about the culture of poverty and shows that children from poor families have the same values as the children from middle class families – not surprisingly, they value high education, secure friendships, stable marriages, steady jobs, and high incomes. However, Swidler claims, “class

similarities in aspirations in no way resolve the question of whether there are class differences in culture. People may share common aspirations while remaining profoundly different to the way their culture organizes affect their overall pattern of behavior” (Swidler 1986: 275). Thus, culture should be understood more “as a set of skills and habits than a set of preferences or wants” (Swidler 1986: 275).

Jeffrey Alexander (2003), a cultural sociologist, while part of the same tradition, proposes a more empirically grounded way to study culture, especially the political one. He shows that every culture consists of a stable set of crucial oppositions, or binary codes, charged with collective emotions that attach positive meanings to one pole of oppositions, while imparting negative meanings to the other pole (Alexander 2003: 152). Alexander uses his method to research US politics. Analyzing the US civil society, he wrote about the prevailing opposition in it between democratic and anti-democratic meanings. “‘Rule regulated,’ for example, is considered homologous with ‘truthful’ and ‘open,’ terms that define social relationships, and with ‘reasonable’ and ‘autonomous,’ elements from the symbolic set that stipulate democratic motives. In the same manner, any element from any set on one side is taken to be antithetical to any element from any set on the other side. Thus hierarchy is thought to be inimical to ‘critical’ and ‘open’ and also to be ‘active’ and ‘self-controlled’” (Alexander 2003: 123).

The political culture approach seems to be more sophisticated and fruitful than the approaches driven by the “civil society” concept. If the latter tends to explain the phenomena of activism of self-organization and simply refers it to “civil society”, the former claims that there is no single “civil society” in a vacuum, and we should look at the empirical specificities of the context (i.e., the political culture). Take “voluntary associations” as an example. They exist in one way or another in any contemporary Western country. They are often described in the literature as a crucial and an inevitable part of a civil society, which is, in turn, an intermediary sphere between a state and citizens. However, other researchers offer illuminating insights into the simplistic character of such descriptions. For example, Risto Alapuro argues in his research on “civil society” discourses in Russia and Estonia,

“The question is, what the concept of civil society means in different countries and cultures, and in different languages. As Jürgen Kocka (2004, 65) and Michel Offerlé (2003, 5-6) point out, it is true not only that the concept has had a successful career in many languages, but the meanings of the phrase denoting what is called “civil society” in English are not identical in other languages. Thus *grazhdanskoe obshchestvo* in Russian, and *kodanikuühiskond* (or *kodanikeühiskond*) in Estonian are not identical concepts.” (Alapuro 2008).

Thus, speaking about “voluntary associations”, we should say that depending on the political culture, the same associations can be connected with a state in a different manner. For example, as Risto Alapuro shows that

in France, such associations are either in control of the state or in opposition to it, while in Finland they are linked to the state by “mutual interaction”:

“In the French atmosphere, in reaction to the threat of social erosion, the interventionist state controlled and regulated the associational activities in order to solve problems of integration. On occasion, during periods of political upheaval, these activities easily developed into protests and demands for autonomy. There was – and allegedly still is – a permanent ambivalence. In Finland, the close relationship to the state implied, in the understanding of the activists, not only state control, but also influence exerted on the state by the associations. ... Not surprisingly, then, the distinction between state and society is so vague that in Finnish (as in Swedish and Norwegian) the term ‘society’ is often used as a synonym for the ‘state’.” (Alapuro 2008: 383).

Local activism and the ways of how activists relate themselves to politics, as discussed in the previous section, depend on the political culture as well. Eeva Luhtakallio (2012), comparing local activism in France to that in Finland, argues that French local activists are always in conflict with the state and other parties they perceive as *political* enemies, while Finnish activists avoid conflicts both with the state and in general. “Normal activism” for the people in Finland means, first of all, collaboration with different agents on the way of effective problem solving, and conflicts are perceived as useless and leading to the unnecessary political confrontation. Similarly, Michèle Lamont and Laurent Thévenot, in their book *“Rethinking Comparative Cultural Sociology: Repertoires of Evaluation in France and the United States”* (2000), found the cultural differences in how local activists connect the “individual”/“personal” on the one hand, and the “public” on the other hand. An “individual” is opposed to the “public” in France, while it is a part of the “public” in the US, because the “public” in America is composed of different individual opinions.

The meaning of “local”, itself, may also differ depending on the political culture: for example, in the US, “locality” is connected to the history of the place and personal stories of people living there as well as their personal economic interests; at the same time, in France, “locality” means common cultural tradition and common good for the region, but it has no connection to individual citizens’ interests; moreover, it is perceived to be too “selfish” to speak about individual interests in public in France (Lamont and Thévenot 2000). Thevenot (2001), thus, insists that any kind of rhetoric towards common good used by the activists is not totally strategic; it is also partly defined by the cultural repertoire or situational arrangements.

Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot, in their famous book *“On Justification. Economies of Worth”* (2006), propose a tool to analyze specificity of the cultural repertoire in public debates. They call this tool the “order of the worth” and define six such orders – civic, market, domestic, fame, inspired, and industrial. However, they leave open the possibility that

other orders of worth may exist as well<sup>2</sup>. Boltanski and Thévenot claim that depending on the culture and the situation, people would use different orders of worth in their public justifications. Tuomas Ylä-Anttila and Eeva Luhtakallio (2015) apply this tool to the comparative analysis of public debates in Finland and France. They show that Finnish activists tend more towards industrial worth arguments, while French activists usually refer to the civic worth justification. It is important that the issues the French and Finnish activists are dealing with, in this case, are almost the same:

“When a group of parents in Finland opposed the city's plans to close down a local primary school, they claimed that the plan was based on inaccurate demographic statistics. When a group of residents in France opposed plans to install parking meters in their neighborhood, they grounded their opposition by claiming that the city's plan was unjust and treated residents of different city districts unequally. Overall, the Finnish claim makers relied most willingly on arguments based on expertise, efficiency and scientific knowledge. The French claim makers counted most of all on argumentation based on equality, justice and solidarity.” (Ylä-Anttila and Luhtakallio 2015: 7).

These differences are explained by the scholars by the differences in political culture between Finland and France. Thus, political cultures make available different “toolkits” (Swidler 1986), with different languages and different modes of thinking and action for the local activism. However, how does political culture in Russia fit this debate?

### **1.2.3. Activist Political Culture in Russia before the “For Fair Elections” Movement: “Rise in Generality”**

The goal of this section is to put Russia into international debate about political culture and local activism, studying activism and not party politics, so the work henceforth mainly speaks about *activist* political culture, which is a narrower part of national political culture. National political culture always defines an activist political culture. However, the changes in activists' political culture *may or may not* lead to the changes in the more general, national political culture. One the arguments, which is introduced in empirical chapters of this monograph is that the activist political culture was changed after the “For Fair Elections” movement, and that this change *may* lead to the change in national political culture. In order to prepare grounds for this argument, this section describes the specificity of activist political culture in Russia before the “For Fair Elections” movement, comparing Russia with the other countries discussed above.

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<sup>2</sup> Thus, Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello in their book “The New Spirit of Capitalism” (2007) define the seventh order of worth, which they call “projective” worth. It is connected, from their point of view, to the contemporary capitalist transformations.

Again, the activist political culture in Russia should not be analyzed through the concept of civil society. As Risto Alapuro shows, “rather than a concept in the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s [in Russia] it was a slogan, conveying the idea that civil society was the prerequisite for the new or future democratic and civilized order” (Alapuro 2008). People attributed different meanings to the same concept of civil society. For example, the activists in the early 1990s perceived “civil society” as number separated from the state institutions involved in self-organization activity, while social scientists considered it as a specific type of *society in general* which presupposes citizens’ autonomy from the state, and respect for human rights (Belokurova 2012). Thus, the question should not be what civil society is, but how civil society and local activism as a part of it is understood by its actors – and here the concept of political culture helps.

As has been stated elsewhere (Zhuravlev, Erpyleva, Savelyeva 2017), the political culture in Russia before the “For Fair Elections” movement, both the activist and the national one, consisted of several basic elements and two are emphasized. The first is a vision “that opposes apoliticism, supposedly part of a normal life, to politics. In other words, the societal majority buys into the notion that politics is associated with violence, empty rhetoric, deceit, and corruption. It is something amoral, while private life, associated with honesty, sincerity, success, and dignity, is something good.” The second is “the primacy of the familiar realm in people’s daily lives. It means that people live their life being engaged in the familiar world of a private sphere, friendship and family. The dominance of familiar know-how in Russia has generated a public realm that is unfamiliar and underdeveloped, and sometimes even “frightening” (Zhuravlev, Erpyleva, Savelyeva 2017). Speaking about Russian *activist* political culture, we can refer to the theory of Jeffrey Alexander discussed above. Alexander defines a political culture through a stable set of crucial oppositions, or binary codes, which each culture shares (Alexander 2003). In the case of Russian activist political culture, its main code can be assumed to be the opposition between abstract politics and concrete, close-to-everyday-life action. That is why apoliticism or apolitical activist culture in Russia and should not be understood as a term, denoting popular passivity (it would be strange indeed, as far as it is an *activist* culture). It encourages the emergence of collective action, just a very specific one. This specificity, which was the feature of collective action taking place in Russia before the “For Fair Elections” movement, is discussed in the literature as well.

It is worth noting that most of local campaigns in Russia before the “For Fair Elections” movement fit either the first or the third logic described in section 1.2.1: people mobilized because their personal private interests were affected (the second element of apoliticism, which is the primacy of private realm, is crucial here) and considered their activity as non-political one, but then in some cases they became aware of more general issues of common good and might even start to struggle for political system changes. Boris Gladarev (2011) describes a typical scenario for such mobilizations as “a break within the regime of familiarity” (in terms of Laurent Thevenot’s theory): the authority invades a familiar environment for ordinary citizens

and changes it – destroys a lovely historical building in a neighborhood, cuts off parks where they walk with children, and so forth. As a response to such an invasion, citizens become involved in the struggle with the local authority.

This logic of mobilization is explicit, for example, in Carine Clement's (2013) research on one of the famous local campaigns in Russia on the eve of the "For Fair Elections" movement – the campaign against the construction of the new road in Khimki Forest that would destroy the ecosystem of the region and jeopardize the revenues of local farmers. The campaign started as an initiative of a young pregnant woman who was walking through the forest when she noticed that a lot of trees were supposed to be cut down. She decided to struggle with this because she really wanted to have such a huge park near her house in order to live in a good ecological environment with her future child (again, the second element of apolitical culture – primacy of the familiar realm – is evident here); she found other neighborhoods that had the same personal motivations to join the campaign. Olga Miryasova (2013) comes to similar conclusions in her research on local mobilization against a toxic factory in a small Russian city. The citizens became involved in the protest campaign only when they realized that some neighborhood dwellers' cancer was probably related to this factory, and one child even died. Elena Tykanova and Anisia Khohlova (2014) also show that local activists fighting against the destruction of a historical building in St. Petersburg in 2000-2010 were mobilized according to Not In My Back Yard<sup>3</sup> logic. All the campaigns, mentioned above, were organized around very concrete, close-to-home issues, which made them culturally legitimated in the eyes of both activist and dwellers. This concrete action was opposed to abstract "dirty" politics.

The features of apolitical activist culture in Russia, which is a part of the national culture of apoliticism, are especially distinct as the result of a comparison of Russian local activism with local activism in other countries. For example, Risto Alapuro and Markku Lonkila (2014) conducted a comparative analysis of diabetes associations and car drivers' organizations in St. Petersburg and Helsinki. Their research reveals that in Helsinki, personal engagement resembled public engagement in both cases: the activists spoke the language of common good from the very beginning (thus, they demanded the right for high quality healthcare for all diabetics or even invalids or the right for freedom of movement for all the drivers). In St. Petersburg, conversely, "the stress on personal attachments and concerns, so prevalent in the internal activity, had an extension in the public engagement" (the activists demanded high quality medications or garages for association's members) (Alapuro and Lonkila 2014: 118). In other words, in the case of Finland, even the personal/private (i.e., personal disease) has been described as a public issue, and in the case of Russia, even the public absence of free good medications for diabetics in the country has been

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<sup>3</sup> Not In My Back Yard logic or activism is the name given by some experts and researchers to the type of activism within which people are described as concerned only about personal issues (those which are close to them) and not about the common good. "Not In My Back Yard" or just NIMBY means here that the new proposal/development that such people oppose is fine for them to be anywhere but not close to their yards.

described as a private issue (be a part of our organization and we will help you personally) (Alapuro and Lonkila 2014). Russian local activists should not be seen as more “selfish”, and any other “psychological” characteristics should not be employed to explain this specificity of the Russian case. It is the Russian activist (a) political culture that makes “close-to-home” issues the only legitimate reason for the people’s mobilization, and the language of personal interest the only legitimate language of conflict framing.

Nevertheless, as Carine Clement shows, even being initially involved in local activism because of their personal interests, some local activists in Russia might “rise in generality” and became aware of more broad political issues (Clement, Miryasova, Demidov 2010, Clement 2013). Tykanova and Khohlova (2014) also found that those local dwellers who started to participate in activism following NIMBY logic, later began to cooperate with other initiatives and to struggle for the systemic changes in urban development policy. This process resembles what Alexis de Tocqueville saw as a working model for American democracy, with the important difference that a really small amount of people and not most of the citizens were involved in this kind of activism in Russia. It is also similar to that which Donatella della Porta and Gianni Piazza (2003) describe in the case of an Italian local campaign for the protection of a valley. However, even if some local activists in Russia, before the “For Fair Elections” movement, spoke the public language of common good, they did not do it from the very beginning of their involvement, as did Helsinki’s local activists; instead, they switched to it after speaking the language of personal interest for some time, realizing that the issue they demanded touched the interests of many other citizens.

Besides the local one-issue campaigns, non-parliamentary opposition politics obviously existed in Russia before the “For Fair Elections” movement, even though quite a small in number of people were involved. This was also a type of activism, in the sense that even the most active members of non-parliamentary parties invested their free time in politics without any monetary reward. The main goal of non-parliamentary opposition parties, regardless of their ideological differences, was to challenge the political regime and finally change the current authority in power. The opposition activists, unlike local activists, were uninterested in local problems; from their point of view, local problems solving can never lead to systemic regime change. In some cases, oppositional activists could participate in local collective action strategically, having as a goal the mobilization of active people to the struggle with the authority in power. In another way, local activism and oppositional activism, while both were types of activist politics, represented two completely different ways of involvement in collective action.

Scholars usually argue that political culture is shaped historically (see, for example, an article of Risto Alapuro, who traces French and Finnish political cultures back to the 18th and 19th centuries, Alapuro 2005). However, big social events (including mass social mobilization) can influence and change political culture (and especially the narrow parts of political culture, such as activist political culture) in a short period of time.

Thus, Ann Swidler (1986) writes about the burst of social movements as the time when new cultural strategies of action are constructed. She claims that social movements may produce new ideologies (meaning by ideology “a highly articulated, self-conscious belief and ritual system, aspiring to offer a unified answer to problems of social action”, Swidler 1986: 279) which start to compete to be transformed into traditions (meaning by tradition “articulated cultural beliefs and practices, but ones taken for granted so that they seem inevitable parts of life”, Swidler 1986: 279).

Indeed, the “For Fair Elections” movement, as an event, was able to produce new strategies of action for local activism. Some researchers started to detect the first signs of this change right after the “For Fair Elections” movement. For example, Ivan Klimov’s (2014) research reveals the emergence in 2012 of many volunteer initiatives oriented not only toward the solution of a concrete problem but also toward the changing of the very rules of institutional work. Maria Turovets (2015), who studies the local mobilization against nickel digging, also argues that it is inaccurate to describe it in terms of an NIMBY campaign – these activists were aware not only of ecological problems in their neighborhood but also about the ecological politics of the state in general. The researchers from the GRANI research centre (2013), in their report on non-political activism in Russia since 2012, found that new people coming to civic activism were initially involved in the struggle for politicized issues, such as fair elections in the whole country; later they switched to more local and concrete problems. This is true for the post-protest local activism as well.

The “For Fair Elections” movement helped to produce a new activist culture or strategies of action, as stated by Ann Swidler (1986). However, alternative to Swidler’s statement, it is not based on the completely new ideology just produced within the event, but based on the original ways of combination and cooptation of the old ideologies that already existed before the “For Fair Elections” movement<sup>4</sup>. Post-protest local activists did not oppose their “concrete” and “local” activity to a “political” one, but combined “local” and “political” into one single frame in their own original manner. How we analyze such mixture and complexity is discussed in the following section.

#### **1.2.4. Activist Political Culture in Russia after the “For Fair Elections” movement: the New Group Style**

As has been shown above, the opposition between concrete action and “politics” structured local activism in Russia before the “For Fair Elections” movement. The activists usually opposed their concrete activity in familiar surroundings using abstract and “dirty” politics. After the “For Fair Elections” protest, this opposition continued to be crucial for the local

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<sup>4</sup> The word “ideology” is the word used by Swidler in her work. In this dissertation, this term is not used as it better to refer to a more general phenomenon which produces particular types of a subject (Althusser) or influence people’s thinking and behavior in all spheres of life, not just the political one. Instead of speaking about “ideology” in what follows, (activist) “political culture”, “rhetoric” or “group style” are used. All these terms are clarified when they emerge in the text of the dissertation.

activism, but the elements of the opposition, i.e., concrete action around “close-to-home” issues and abstract “politics” were recombined and opposed to each other in different ways. These ways differ depending on the situational arrangements or social background of the participants and, moreover, these ways have been changed through time. Thus, political culture is too broad a concept to describe this complexity, as it does not take into account the pragmatic aspect of culture, or how the cultural codes are actually used in practice (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003). A term that is more sensitive to situational and other settings is proposed by Nina Eliasoph and Paul Lichterman, who elaborate on and simultaneously criticize Alexander’s approach to culture.

Nina Eliasoph and Paul Lichterman have called for a pragmatic way of analyzing cultural codes. They argue that depending on circumstances and the type of community, people understand, articulate, and give meaning to the dominant cultural oppositions in different ways (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003). Eliasoph and Lichterman conceptualize these ways as “group styles”, saying that styles “filter the collective representations” and “arise from a group’s shared assumptions about what constitutes good or adequate participation in the group setting” (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003: 737). A group style is a set of notions shared by members of small groups, the group’s attitude to the outside world (“group boundaries”), the way the group’s members perceive themselves (“group bonds”), and the discursive practices they use to discuss problems relevant to the group (“speech norms”) (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003: 785).

Other scholars have already used the notion of group style in order to analyze the specificity of activist political culture. Thus, Eeva Luhtakallio (2012) applies it to compare local activism in France and Finland. She shows that the Finnish and French groups differ in a sense of their group boundaries, group bonds and speech (and action – she adds this dimension by herself) norms. As for the group boundaries, French activists mainly oppose to the external world – to state, to police, and to other political actors, while Finnish activists usually look for the compromises and alliances with the external world. Group bonds, in France, are incorporated in the very space of the neighborhood – there are announcements about important local events on the streets, most neighbors communicate with each other sitting in cafes or other public places outside where they discuss recent news and talk about politics. Finnish local activism is more anonymous but “the web of associations and people’s multiple memberships in them form the comfortable, shared networks of trust and a sense of ‘we-ness’” (Luhtakallio 2012). Finally, while Finnish activists try to avoid any association of their activity with politics, French activists consider their work as primarily political (Luhtakallio 2012).

The group styles are part of the culture and that is why groups do not create them from scratch. At the same time, different groups may have different styles, because styles do not just reproduce, but filter political culture. This concept allows an analysis of how different parts of the “old” political culture that existed before the “For Fair Elections” movement were brought together and recombined, creating new “hybrids” and new original

ways to relate “local” and “concrete” to “political” and “abstract”. Defining the group style concept, Eliasoph and Lichterman (2003) claim that it is culture and not “social structure” that contribute mostly to the particular group style, and Luhtakallio (2012) follows their idea. However, this dissertation shows that “social structure” in its interactive dimension (not “socioeconomic status” as a stable set of characteristics, but biographical trajectories or “careers” as successive change of individual’s statuses and “moving perspectives”) should be taken into account in order to explain exactly how one or another group style has been created. These are activist careers which help us to explain how new group style was formed after the event of the “For Fair Elections” movement as a result of the original combination of the elements of the old opposition between concrete action around “close-to-home” issues and “politics”.

Of course, not only cultural but also structural factors contributed to the emergence of post-protest local activism in Russia. “Closed” political opportunity structure, the end of the electoral cycle and the very ways of how the electoral system is organized (“municipal district” as a primary electoral unit) created the necessary conditions for the new local activism. These conditions are analyzed in the third chapter of the monograph. At the end of the third chapter, the full conceptual model of this research is presented.

### **1.3. Conclusion and Research Objectives**

This dissertation thus is based on and contributes to different subfields in social science. It is built on insight from the sociology of event, social movement studies, political socialization, and political culture research. Basically, it bridges a study of an event and a study of biography and explains the possibility of change in political culture by transformations of biographies as a result of an event. Thus, event, biography, and culture are three basic elements of this research. Taken together, they create a new approach to conceptualizing and to explaining cultural changes. This approach can be advantageous for all of the subfields mentioned above. It fills the gaps in the sociology of event, showing the exact mechanisms of producing changes through an event. It develops the studies of biography and socialization as far as it connects rarely intersecting approaches within them and resolves the dilemma of continuity/routine and conversion/change connection. It enlarges research on political culture by describing the exact mechanism of cultural changes. Finally, it contributes to developing the knowledge about the contemporary political situation in Russia, which has practical rather than significance significance, but this significance should not be neglected in the current political situation in Russia and the world. However, the main contribution is to return the biographical and socialization dimension into the analysis of cultural changes as a result of an event.

The main **objective** of this research is to develop a new approach to study cultural changes as a result of an event through a biography using the

“For Fair Elections” movement as a lens. To attain it, the following **secondary objectives** need to be carried out:

1) to describe how the nationwide “For Fair Elections” movement was possible in Russia and how it led to the emergence of the new local activism (Chapter III);

2) to understand how the specificity of socialization and biographical experience explains the long-term local activist involvement in Russia, and how the nationwide post-electoral protest event contributes to this process (Chapter IV);

3) to analyze how exactly the activist political culture has been changed in the new local activism after the “For Fair Elections” movement (Chapter V);

4) to conceptualize the role of biography as a tool to study cultural changes through an event (Chapter V, Sections 5.3.3 and Discussion).

## CHAPTER II. METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the methodology of the research is described in detail. The chapter is divided into several sections. First, the reader is familiarized with the general methodological approach on which the empirical study based. Second, particular research methods are introduced: interview, focus-groups, and observation. Third, the fieldwork is described in detail: how the local groups were chosen, how interviews, focus-groups and observations were conducted, and what kind of data the research is based on as a result. Fourth, the methods of data analysis are presented, where biographical interviews' analysis is the main method, and focus-groups and observation materials' analysis are the complementary ones. Finally, the tricky ethical issues which might arise during the empirical research are discussed.

### ***2.1. Methodological Approach***

Studying socialization and biographies of people that researchers usually refer to is two different processes: on the one hand, subjective conceptualization of her/his own life by an interviewee that is, the sequence of politically meaningful for her/him events; on the other hand, actual adoption of some specific attitudes and orientations, that is, actual sequence of events leading to the one or another outcome from the researcher's point of view, no matter how important they are for an interviewee. Those who prefer the first way often use life-story and narrative interview methodology (see, for example: Keniston 1968, Sacks 1989, Andrews 1991), and those who elaborate the second way are usually adherents of quantitative analysis of poll's data (McAdam 1990, Niemi and Sobieszek 1977).

The most well-known tradition in biographical analysis, in general, represented by German sociologists Martin Kohli, Fritz Schütze, and Wolfram Fischer-Rosenthal, is centered on the examination of "the life story itself, seen as a social construct in its own right" (Rosenthal 1993). Only a few scholars, such as, for example, Gabriel Rosental (1993), try taking into account both the life story a person tells and the actual sequences of events he/she experienced. Thus, Rosental distinguishes two levels in biographical interview – the experienced life history and the narrated life story. However, in her actual research, she usually analyzes the narrated life stories using experienced histories rather than using narrated stories as an explanatory background for the former.

The most fruitful way to study biographies and the political socialization of activists for the goals of this research seems to be the integration of both of these approaches. As Francesca Polletta, a sociologist, claims, the structural conditions people live in and face are perceived (and, thus, influence) only through means of language, narratives, stories (Polletta 1992, Polletta 2006). As Donatella della Porta, a social movement scholar, puts it, the memories of activists "give us a means of relating the macro- and

mesoconditions” (della Porta 1995). At the same time, as we know from the Chicago school of sociology tradition, the “realist”/“objectivist” approach is as important as the “constructivist”/“subjectivist” one in the reconstruction of careers. Thus, the very notion of “activist career”, which is central for this research, implies that people’s biographies are both “a series of objective changes of position and an associated series of subjective upheavals” (Fillieule 2010: 4). The life-story method developed by Daniel Bertaux appears to be the best fit for this approach.

Bertaux’s method is based on the collection of in-depth biographical interviews, which are no more than semi-structured. The information from the interviews is both factual and interpretative; in other words, it can be used “both as evidence of fact along with perceptions and evaluations” (Bertaux and Thompson 1997). As Daniel Bertaux and Paul Thompson (1997) write in their work on a qualitative approach to social mobility, interviews “are used as sources to reveal what happened to the interviewee, how and why it happened, what he/she felt about it, and how he/she reacted to it”. In his own research on French bakeries, Bertaux (1994) uses life-stories with bakers to analyze how the reproduction of the whole industry is possible; and in collaboration with Isabelle Bertaux-Wiame, he studies the professional biographies of one family in four generations, showing how the inheritance of some capitals and innovations created by each family member are intertwined with family’s history (Bertaux and Bertaux-Wiame 1992). Bertaux and his colleagues use the life-story as a method to study social structure, history and their interplay through biographies in order to investigate a certain set of social relationships (Bertaux 1997, Bertaux and Kohli 1984). Thus, Bertaux’s life-story method is used in this dissertation in order to collect both factual information about the life-courses of activists and their interpretation of meaningful events. While he does not explicitly associate his method with the Chicago school of sociology, it actually corresponds very closely to this tradition. These two aspects of lives, “objective” and “subjective”, as the Chicago school scholars imply, create the “careers” of people and are necessary to understand the process of political socialization and involvement.

## **2.2. Data Collection**

Thus, in-depth biographical interview is the main data collection method for this research. The interview guide consists of two parts: the first one begins with the question “Please, tell me about yourself, you can start with your childhood and include in your story everything you think is important” (here the technic of narrative biographical interview is used), and the second one opens with the question “Please, tell me how you became involved in local activism You can start with the very beginning of this story and finish it with today’s events”. Both parts are accompanied by supportive questions. The biographical part includes questions about parental family experience and early socialization, junior/middle/high school and university experience – friendships, conflicts with significant

adults, and so forth. Questions about interviewee's hobbies, any types of voluntary activity, and occupational trajectory are also asked. The "activist" part consists of questions about first civic/political participation, involvement in the "For Fair Elections" movement, participation in local activism during several years – in other words, the interviewer asks a person to reconstruct her activist experience in a chronological way. The interview guide can be found in Attachment 1.

Using the advice of Robin Humphrey, the interviewer tries to avoid direct questions about people's attitudes and beliefs, "since the answers to such questions are particularly prone to the distorting influence of the present" (Humphrey 1993: 169). According to Humphrey, "by researching in this manner, life stories can be created which bear adequate correspondence to actual individual life histories and can then be subjected to historical analysis" (Humphrey 1993: 169).

One of the key features of almost all interviews is that the interviewees did not actually tell the stories. Even replying to the opening questions designed to provoke story-telling (for example, "Please, tell me about yourself. You can start with your childhood and include in your story everything you think is important"), they usually reported basic biographical information (was born in, was graduated from, worked at) and went silent waiting the interviewer to ask the questions. It might be assumed that because of the lack of activist tradition in Russian society, people have not developed the skills necessary to relate their personal biographies to the activist experience. However, speaking about the methodology, not only the method of interview chosen, but also the very character of data received, make this data suitable for the life-history analysis. The information from the interviews can be used "both as evidence of fact along with perceptions and evaluations." Indeed, we cannot really say that these people tell different stories about their biographies – because they do not tell stories – instead, they reply in different ways to the questions posed by the interviewer. Thus, the "careers" described in this work are analytical constructions made by the researcher rather than self-representations proposed by the interviewees.

Additional data collection methods are focus-groups and observation. Focus-groups are usually conducted by researchers when they need to investigate some particular sub-group in detail (Patton 2001). Despite the fact that the primary unit of this research is an individual trajectory, we should not forget that activists are organized in groups. Thus, focus-groups conducted with several members of each local group is used to look at a particular group's dynamic. They also help to reveal, in discussion, different perspectives of activity coexisting within one group. Observation allows researchers to obtain more unstructured data than the data received from interviews (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). In my case, the sessions of observation at the local groups' meetings and campaigns are designed in order to understand how the activists speak about their activity and politics not only in the interviews with the researchers but also in real communicational settings. The results of the sessions of observation and focus-groups are combined with the results from the interviews.

Finally, the follow-up interviews are conducted as the last step of data collection. It should be noted that follow-up interview as a method of data collection was not planned in advance. When starting to conduct focus-groups and sessions of observation, my colleagues and I found that the way of how the activists frame the meanings and goals of their activity changed. In order to be able to analyze how this change happened in details, we have decided to conduct follow-up interviews with the activists interviewed several years ago. The follow-up guide consists of two parts, as well as the first interview guide. The first part begins with the preamble and the question “I have not seen you for X years, please, tell me what happened in your life during this time.” The second part begins with a similar question “Please, tell me now what was changed in the group during this time.” Both parts are accompanied by supportive questions, with the emphasis on the ways of framing the purposes and goals of the local activism in the second part. Thus, chronologically, follow-up interview is the last (but not least) method of data collection.

### **2.3. Data Description**

This dissertation research is a part of a large research project on the new local activism in Russia, conducted by Public Sociology Laboratory (PS Lab)<sup>5</sup>. In March of 2012, the first local groups started to appear in municipal districts of Moscow and St. Petersburg on the back of the “For Fair Elections” protest, organized by former “For Fair Elections” movement’s participants. During next several years, the groups continued to emerge in other districts, either created by the protesters of “For Fair Elections” movement, or organized by local citizens in order to solve concrete problems, but with the help of former protesters. This research was conducted on post-protest local activism starting from 2012 and to 2015. During this period of time, by monitoring social networks, it was found that at least 17 such groups existed in Moscow, 9 groups were organized in Moscow region, 11 groups emerged in St. Petersburg, and 6 groups worked in Leningrad region. Throughout four years of empirical work, as many groups as possible were contacted and interviews with as many members of each group as possible were conducted. The resulting database consisted of in-depth interviews with 149 activists from 37 groups. In several groups, the majority of activists were talked to, but in most of the other groups, only a few members were interviewed.

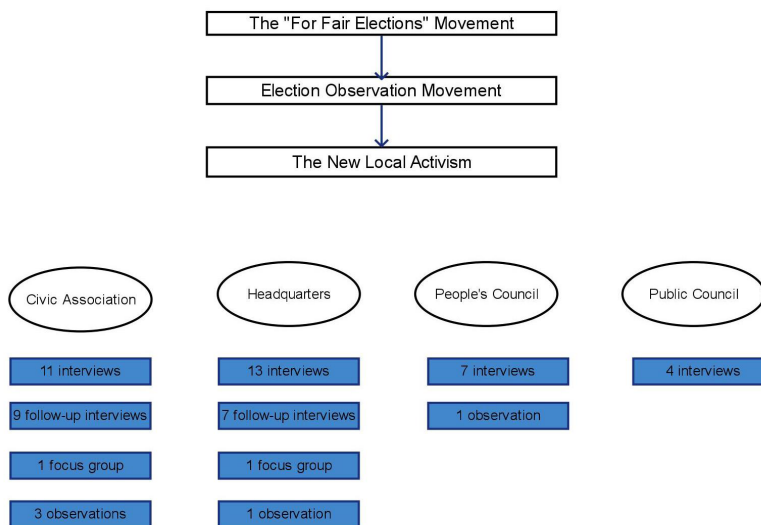
For this dissertation, four local groups were chosen from this database<sup>6</sup>, which matched two criteria. First, at least half of the members of these groups were interviewed, and thus the group dynamic can be studied.

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<sup>5</sup> Some results of the collective research have been already published the Russian Analytical Digest (Zhuravlev, Erpyleva, Savelyeva 2017). The argument developed in this dissertation has been presented there briefly.

<sup>6</sup> The data used in the dissertation was mostly collected by the author and Natalia Savelyeva, with the exception of 2 interviews and 1 observation session which were conducted by Oleg Zhuravlev, and 1 interview and 1 observation session which were conducted by Maxim Alyukov.

Second, the groups chosen emerged in spring 2012<sup>7</sup>, right after the Presidential elections, and were among the first local activist groups that appeared. This choice allowed a study of how the new local activism takes its shape. The first group is “Civic Association”, it was organized in a small city very close to St. Petersburg (which is officially the administrative district of St. Petersburg). The second, third and fourth groups emerged in different Moscow municipal districts: “Headquarters”, “People’s Council” and “Public Council”. The names of the groups, as well as the personal names of interviewees, are anonymized<sup>8</sup>. Twelve activists of “Civic Association”, 13 activists of “Headquarter”, 7 activists of “People’s Council” and 4 activists of “Public Council” were interviewed. The data is summarized in the schema below:



The contacts with the activists were established through the public pages devoted to their activity in “Vkontakte”. The invitation to participate in the research was sent to group administrators (1 administrator for every groups, thus, 4 persons in total). The rest of the interviewees (32) were found through the snowball method. The interviews were conducted in cafes/public parks, or in the offices of particular groups.

The research conducted is, at least, partly longitudinal. The interviews with the most members of “Civic Association” and “Headquarters” were repeated after some time. The first interviews with this

<sup>7</sup> Three of them were organized just after Presidential elections in March 2012, and the fourth one became a civic group (the name for group has been chosen and the activists started to consider themselves as the members of the same “group) in spring, 2014, but the people that organized it met each other in spring 2012 as well, and have been informally cooperating with each other during different local campaigns since then. The historical development of each of the groups is presented in Chapter III.

<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, the fictional names of the groups used here reflect the principle of how real group names are organized. All of them (sic!) consist of two parts: the first is an established term referring to civic participation practice (for example, “People’s Council” or “Civic Association”) and the second part is the name of the administrative district this group belongs to. For example, the name of the group may sound like “Civic Association of Luzhniki district”. In my dissertation, the second part is left out completely for anonymization reasons, and the first part using similar but not exactly the same expressions translated.

activists took place in the year after the groups' emergence, and the session of follow-up interviews was organized 1-2 years later, in order to have a fuller picture of the activists' life trajectories some time after the "For Fair Elections" movement. Not all interviewees were available for the follow-up meeting – some of them had quit activism, and others did not have time for the meeting. Nevertheless, most activists were interviewed twice. The interviews with the members of "People's Council" and "Public Council" were conducted only once, 3 years after the groups' emergence. Thus, while 36 activists were interviewed, the total number of interviews conducted is 52. Among 36 interviewees, there were 22 males and 14 females. The data is summarized in the table in the below:

Name	Sex	Year of birth	Education	Parents' education	Date of 1 <sup>st</sup> interview	Date of 2 <sup>nd</sup> interview
<b>Civic Association</b>						
Alexander	Male	1989	higher, agricultural	higher, economy and military	April 2012	September 2013
Maria	Female	1983	higher, law	higher, engineering	April 2012	September 2013
Dina	Female	1990	higher, philology	higher, engineering	April 2012	-----
Pavel	Male	1969	higher, psychology	higher, engineering	May 2012	September 2013
Marina	Female	1982	higher, journalism	higher, linguistics	May 2012	September 2013
Vlad	Male	1996	Pupil	higher, pedagogy and military	May 2012	September 2013
Dmitry	Male	1981	-----	higher, agricultural	February 2013	September 2013
Makar	Male	1968	higher, agricultural	higher	February 2013	September 2013
Ivan	Male	1987	higher, logistics	higher, medicine and military	September 2014	-----
Mila	Female	1981	incomplete higher, library science	higher, musician and artist	September 2014	November 2015
Petr	Male	1977	higher, polytechnic	higher, engineering	September 2014	November 2015
<b>Headquarters</b>						
Anton	Male	1987	higher, book science	vocational training, construction and pharm	January 2013	September 2013 + December 2015
Kirill	Male	1986	higher, political science	higher, book science	January 2013	September 2013
Luba	Female	1995	student, geography	higher, chemistry and biology	January 2013	September 2013
Tamara	Female	1978	higher, journalism	higher, physics	January 2013	-----
Gregory	Male	1984	higher, mathematics	higher, philology and musician	February 2013	September 2013
Gleb	Male	1984	higher, physics	higher, engineering	February 2013	September 2013
Denis	Male	1987	higher, engineering	higher, physics	September 2013	-----
Platon	Male	1975	vocational training, engineering	higher, engineering	November 2013	January 2016
Svetlana	Female	1981	higher, management	higher, pedagogy	November 2013	December 2015
Alexandra	Female	1975	higher, pedagogy	vocational training	November 2013	-----

Victor	Male	1986	higher, journalism	higher, biology and genealogy	November 2013	-----
Egor	Male	1966	higher, mathematics	higher, biology	December 2015	-----
Galina	Female	1986	higher, design	higher, medicine	December 2015	-----
<b>People's Council</b>						
Andrey	Male	1982		Vocational training, programming and bench-work	November 2015	
Kim	Male	1988	higher, engineering	higher, mathematics	November 2015	
Max	Male	1983	higher, journalism	higher, medicine and engineering	October 2015	
Tanya	Female	1983	higher, management	vocational training	November 2015	
Diana	Female	1990	higher, biology, biophysics	vocational training	November 2015	
Uliana	Female	1989	higher, foreign languages		November 2015	
Roman	Male	1974	higher, psychology	higher, engineering	November 2015	
<b>Public Council</b>						
Leda	Female	1958	higher, engineering	higher, economics	September 2015	
Mark	Male	1964	higher, medicine	higher, engineering	September 2015	
Yana	Female	1981	higher, economics	higher, engineering	September 2015	
Nikita	Male	1980	higher, law	higher, foreign languages and economics	September 2015	

Focus-groups were conducted with all available members of two local groups, two years after groups' emergence (Autumn of 2014). The focus-group with the core members of "Civic Association" in September 2014 was carried out by the author of this dissertation, and 6 members of the group took part in it. The focus-group with the core "Headquarters" members with 5 activists present it was organized by Natalia Savelyeva. Both focus-groups were designed to receive a full picture of the group's development over a given time and to reveal in discussion different perspectives of activity coexisting within one group.

The sessions of observations have been conducted one or several times within three of four groups. Three sessions of observations in "Civic Association" were taken by my colleagues (Oleg Zhuravlev and Maxim Alyukov) and I: during the working meeting of the activists; during the walk through the neighborhood organized by the activists focused on taking pictures of problems in urban development (such as holes in pavement or absence of wheelchair ramps) and communication with local dwellers; and during the informal meeting where the activists, hanging out, drinking alcohol and chatting to each other. One session of observation in the "Headquarter" during the working meeting of activists was carried out by my colleague Natalia Savelyeva and I. Another one was conducted by Natalia Savelyeva during the informal meeting of the "People's Council" activists celebrating the birthday of one of their members.

As Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson point out, “fieldnotes are always selective: it is not possible to capture everything” (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 142). During all the sessions the process of how the activists combined “real deeds” and more politicized modes of involvement in practice was mostly observed: how and when did they speak about their goals as “political” ones, how and when did they frame the goals as apolitical local problems solving. In all cases, the fieldnotes were made right after observation sessions. In situations where more than one researcher conducted observations, all the researchers made their own fieldnotes and all of them were used for the analysis. In all cases the activists knew that the observing persons were researchers; nevertheless, the researchers were on friendly terms with several activists and, thus, they were perceived as friends rather than as observers, especially during the informal meeting. In other words, there is a good reason to suppose that the personal features of observers did not influence a lot the activists’ communication.

## **2.4. Data Analysis**

The research is mainly based on the analysis of in-depth biographical interviews with the activists. Data collected by observations and focus-groups are used as a supplementary in order to fully understand group dynamics, and the rhetoric used by the local groups’ members describing their activity in relation to “politics”.

All the interviews were transcribed according to “denaturalism” principle, “in which idiosyncratic elements of speech (e.g., stutters, pauses, nonverbal involuntary vocalizations) are removed” (Oliver et al. 2005: 1274). This principle is usually used by researchers when they are interested in the content of interviewees’ speech first of all.

The analysis of the interviews was conducted in 3 steps. As far as Bertaux proposed no concrete step-by-step schema for biographical interview analysis, and the schema proposed by Rosental was more centered on life story than life history, the original schema for analyzing the interviews based on existing approaches was elaborated in this research.

At first, the materials of each individual interview were synthesized, summarizing their specific trajectories and motives. The result was a one-page, detailed, bio statement detailing the actual sequences of experienced events along with their perceived meanings and interpretations for each person (36 pages in total). However, as Stephen Barley claims, “career lines can exist only when a number of individuals followed the same path” (Barley 1989: 51). Apparently, there are plenty of biographical pathways leading to the involvement into activism and each of them is unique in its own sense. However, the goal of this research is to reveal common features across individual variability. To do so, the research focuses, as Traïni puts it, “on the contrasts between a small number of ideal types of conversion” (Traïni 2012: 9), where “ideal type” understood in a Weberian sense as that which is “formed by the one-sided accentuation of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and

occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified thought construct” (Weber 1949).

That is why the second stage was a comparison. “Individual cases” were compared and people who described similar experiences of events before the “For Fair Elections” movement were clustered as representatives of the same type of “career”. The exact number of such types was not defined in advance. As a result of the analysis, four different types of activist careers emerged; three individual trajectories were not included in any category. They are addressed separately in the empirical chapter. At this step, each career has been also divided into particular stages: the main criteria for the differentiation of stages was switching from one type of activity to another (for example, from public activity in school to non-political civic activity outside any institution, and from passive awareness about politics through following political news to active participation in political events). Another sign for defining a particular type of activity as a separate “stage” of career was the fact that this activity can be found in the experience of representatives of different careers. For example, “public activity at school” is the first stage of both “doers” and “volunteers” careers, but these careers differ by what follows after this stage.

Third, how people described events and experiences that were defined as common for the representatives of each type of career were studied. Representatives of different careers’ self-presentations in interviews were approached, analyzing how they frame their activity at each stage of career. In other words, how previous experience of activists produce new experience, how events people experience change their self-conceptions, and how all these changes lead people to the long-term local activism, within each type of career was studied separately. At this step, the emphasis was made also on the ways of how the representatives of different career types approach and frame the meaning and goals of the local activism. After the particular approaches were identified through the analysis of the interviews conducted in 2012, they were compared to the ways of speaking about local activity present in follow-up interviews and focus-groups conducted several years later. That is how the evolution of activist culture within the new local activism was analyzed.

As stated above, the data collected during observation sessions and focus-groups were rather used as supplementary material, yet the important one. Interviews are good for the analysis of individual biographies and thinking, which is the first step for creation career types. However, interviews do not show how people actually communicate different visions of activists practice among each other, how they collide or find a consensus. Focus-groups materials were helpful in the analysis of group dynamics and the ways of how different visions and meanings faced with each other. As far as focus-groups were conducted at the later periods of groups’ existences, they show rather a consensus than a conflict. Moreover, focus-groups materials were helpful in a similar way as follow-up interviews, as it was already stated above. The ways of how the same interviewees speak about meaning and goals of the local activism during the first interview, the focus-

group, and the follow-up interview were compared among each other (when available) in order to analyze the evolution of activist political culture.

The ways of how the representatives of different careers frame their local activity were identified through interview and focus-groups scripts, but then the observational fieldnotes were used in order to make sure the different visions of the sense and goals of local activism exist not only in interviewees' self-presentations but also in real communicational settings. Empirical findings from interviews and focus-groups were related to the data from observational fieldnotes.

However, the number of sessions of observation is not enough to use them as extensively as interview data is used. Thus, the interview data remains the main data for the analysis, even if several times in the text reference is made to focus-groups or observational fieldnotes.

## **2.5. Research Ethic**

During the sociological research, especially the qualitative one, ethical and moral issues can arise at every stage of research. The most crucial one is an informed consent, implying "informing the research subject about overall purpose of the investigation and the main features of the design, as well as of any possible risks and benefits from participation in research project" (Kvale 2008: 112). Sometimes it is not easy to receive a fully informed consent – for example, when interviewees do not have enough knowledge to understand the research goals or when the understanding of the research goals can influence research results. In this research, none of these problems arose. The interviewees were informed about the research goals as fully as possible, and research subjects were educated enough to understand what the research is about. Moreover, as activists, they knew about possible risks even better than the researcher. The interviewees' knowledge about research goals did not impede research process; on the contrary, it helped a lot: thus, the interviewees were not surprised that they are asked to tell in detail about their lives before the "For Fair Elections" movement<sup>9</sup>.

The second important ethical issue is confidentiality: ascertaining that private data identifying the subject will not be publicly reported (Kvale 2008). This issue is crucial in the case of research on activists' organizations in Russia because the activists are often prosecuted for their work and beliefs. Consequently, the names of interviewees were anonymized and also the names of local groups in this research. Even if all groups studied were organized in small districts of Moscow and St.Petersburg and could be well-known within these districts, there were other similar groups in Moscow and St.Petersburg which were not included in this research. The efforts were made not only to anonymize the interviewees within each group, but also to

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<sup>9</sup> At the same time, the interviewees were not asked to sign an official University paper saying that they are fully informed about research goals and agreed to participate in interview, as far as the European University at Saint-Petersburg did not demand such papers. However, the interviewees were fully informed about the research goals and objectives.

anonymize the groups themselves- in a way it would not be clear which groups exactly were studied. The ways of safe data storing are important for the keeping of anonymity of research subjects, especially in the context of Russia. All data are kept at the “Sync” cloud storage which is considered to be safer than well-know “Dropbox” or “Google drive” storages. The password to enter the “Sync” folder is known only by me and my colleagues from Public Sociology Laboratory.

Finally from an ethical perspective, “the sum of potential benefits to a subject and the importance of the knowledge gained should outweigh the risks of harm to the subject” (Kvale 2008: 116). The risk of personal harm is minimized in this research by the anonymization of all personal information. At the same time, potential benefits have already been mentioned by the activists themselves – thus, some of them posted the links to the preliminary results of the research of our Laboratory on Facebook, with the comments that it is really important to discuss such things in science and the media.

To conclude, friendly and trust-based relationships with the activists were established during the fieldwork. The interviewees were fully informed about research design and goals, all personal information was anonymized and the activists themselves found the research important and meaningful for the community.

## **CHAPTER III. HOW SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND POLITICAL CULTURE CONTRIBUTED TO THE “FOR FAIR ELECTIONS” MOVEMENT AND LOCAL ACTIVISM**

This chapter familiarizes the reader with the context in which the “For Fair Elections” (FFE) movement and then post-protest local activism emerged. Thus, in the first section of this chapter, the political landscape (which includes both political culture and political opportunity structure) in Russia since the USSR collapse is analyzed. In the second section, the event of the FFE movement is introduced, and some explanations of the emergence of the movement are given. The third section is devoted to the analysis of two specific phenomena produced by the FFE movement and crucial for the post-protest local activism: expansion of the “real deeds” rhetoric and politicization of election observation. In the fourth section, the ways the FFE protests influenced the political landscape in Russia are traced. Finally, the fifth section deals with how local activism, in general, and the local civic groups, in particular, have been created. This information allows a reader to situate the activist careers in a broader social and political context.

### ***3.1. Political Landscape Before the “For Fair Elections” Movement***

Describing the political culture of Russian society after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, many researchers agree that it was characterized by alienation and escape from any political and public experience. The book, *Politic of Apolitics* (2015), proposed calling this culture “depoliticized” or the culture of apoliticism. As my colleagues and I explain in our article “Nationwide Protest and Local Action: How Anti-Putin Rallies Politicized Russian Urban Activism”, it means “that apoliticism should not be deemed a tautological umbrella term, denoting popular passivity, but a set of cultural and practical mechanisms that generally support non-involvement in public politics, but might also encourage the emergence of certain types of collective action.” (Zhuravlev, Erpyleva, Savelyeva 2017).

Below, the origins of the contemporary culture of apoliticism are briefly traced. This culture basically refers to several conditions that have been limiting political participation of Russian citizens, at least, before 2011-12. The discrediting of the official Soviet public politics connected with the failure of Khrushchev’s Thaw in the early 1970s and popular disenchantment with the communist project led to two types of “anti-Soviet” conduct: on the one hand, the dissident movement, and the escape into private life marked by an “ethic of non-participation” in official politics on the other. After the mobilization of the late 1980s and early 1990s, a new

exodus of Post-Soviet people into private life took place (Howard 2003, Magun 2013, Prozorov 2008). Late-soviet and post-soviet depoliticization synchronized different attitudes within a single trend and two main elements of this trend have already been traced above. The first was the stigmatization of both official and protest politics (Howard 2003). The second was the rejection of collective and public in favor of individual and private (Kharkhordin 1993, Kashirskih 2013, Ledeneva 1997). In Putin's time, starting from 2000s, these already existing trends were coupled with the risks of political participation under authoritarianism (see below). All together, these attitudes hinder peoples' involvement in the public sphere (Zhuravlev, Erpyleva, Savelyeva 2017).

There were, of course, some mass protest movements in different regions in Russia before the FFE movement, and among them were the strikes of miners in the 1990s, the movement against the monetization of benefits in 2005, the mass protest against the city authorities in Kaliningrad, and others (Clement 2015). However, only 'benefits monetization' protests were truly nationwide, and none of them were organized around the mass demands of regime change. Moreover, these kinds of collective actions emerged, not in spite of, but rather because of the culture of apoliticism. As has been already discussed in Chapter I, the activism before the FFE movement was marked by the emergence of the "small deeds" principle: in contrast to dirty and deceitful politics, activists fashioned an ethic that affirmed the primacy of specific actions, producing outcomes beneficial to society at large. Most of the big protests before the FFE movement, in one way or another, came from concrete daily issues such as the loss of social benefits or the destroying of public parks, and not around "too abstract" regime change claims. Thus, the political culture in Russia on the eve of the FFE movement could both prevent people from mobilization or determine the mode of this mobilization, making it based on the "small deeds" principle.

Besides political culture, the political opportunity structure (McAdam et al 2001), that is, vulnerability of political system to a challenge, deserves special attention. Many researchers describe the political regime established in Russia in the early 2000s as "electoral authoritarianism" (Goloso 2011), which mostly refers to the process of centralization of presidential power combined with the illusion of multi-party democracy. Thus, according to Freedom House rankings, Russia had one of the lowest The Democracy Score indexes according to both "political rights" and "civil liberties" indexes on the edge of the FFE protest (Freedom in the World 2010); the indices of the absence of corruption and the presence of independent media were also very low. The parliamentary opposition, which was able to compete with the regime in the early 1990s gradually became more and more subjected to the party of power. The centralization of power benefited from the economic environment – the economic growth caused by the growing oil prices (Liik 2013). The actual oppositional parties had no chance to participate in parliamentary politics and, thus, were pushed to the back of the political life of the country. Because of their marginalized positions on the Russian political map as well as the marginalization of political participation in

general, they were not able to mobilize a lot of people to support their actions. For example, during the previous parliamentary election in 2007, the actual opposition created a coalition called “Other Russia” and tried to mobilize people to protest against electoral fraud. They conducted some small pickets and rallies, but most ordinary citizens showed no interest in joining them (Surkichanova 2014). Thus, the political opportunity structure seemed to be unfavorable for any political mobilization. How could the mass nationwide FFE movement be possible in such circumstances? The following describes the key specific features of the FFE movement, as well as the main explanations it received in literature.

### ***3.2. Specific Features and Existing Explanations of the “For Fair Elections” Movement Emergence***

The “For Fair Elections” movement in Russia was triggered by the electoral fraud during the State Duma elections on December 4, 2011. The movement’s name is a tribute to Moscow square, where most protest actions took place. On December 5, after Facebook and Vkontakte.ru had been flooded by the evidence of fraud provided by independent observers, and the ruling party “United Russia” (nicknamed the “Party of Swindlers and Thieves”) had shown historically low results even after the unfair boost, thousands of people — many of them participating in protest actions for the first time — suddenly took the streets in Moscow, St. Petersburg and other large cities. More than 300 participants of this rally were arrested in Moscow, and a comparable number of arrests took place in Saint-Petersburg. On December 10, about 100.000 people gathered for the sanctioned rally in the center of Moscow (accompanied by smaller but relatively considerable rallies in other big cities). Protesters mainly opposed the authoritarian, corrupt regime in power and wanted political change (for example, Putin personally became a target of discursive attack: in particular, after his violent offenses comparing protesters’ insignia, white ribbon, to condoms, and accusations of getting “cookies” from the West). The main slogans of the protesters included fair election and the denunciation of corruption. Honesty and dignity were the main values involved. A lot of media stars, including singers and writers, were among the rallies’ speakers. The statistics show that the protesters were quite heterogeneous, but, on average, they represented the more well off and educated strata of the population (Volkov 2012).

Conventionally, all large rallies held in big Russian cities from December 2011 until the end of 2013 are perceived as a part of the movement. The next round of large protest rallies across the country took place on December 24. At that time, even more people joined the movement: for example, a Moscow rally consisted of around 120.000 participants. In two months, on February 4, 2012, another round of protest rallies was organized and slightly less people took part in it. After that, in March 2012, many ordinary rallies’ participants became electoral observers at the Presidential elections for the first time in their lives (the electoral

observation as a phenomenon is described in detail in the next section of the chapter). After Putin’s victory at this election (partly because of electoral fraud, but analysts agree that even without the fraud Putin would win because he still was the most popular candidate for the majority of the population), some people came to the unauthorized rallies and many of them were arrested. The next large rally, the so-called “March of the Millions”, was timed to Putin’s inauguration and took place on May 6 in Moscow. It resulted in violent clashes between protesters and the police and more than 400 people were arrested. Peaceful demonstrations were held in the main, big Russian cities on June 12. Scholars notice a decline in the participation rate after the March 4 presidential elections, and a moderate revival during the months of May and June, when the regime became more repressive towards the movement (Lasnier 2017a). The next smaller demonstrations took place in September 2012, December 2012, January 2013, May 2013, and July 2013 . However, they failed to mobilize as many people as before. Many of the former participants of the FFE rallies were disappointed in the protest because the protest led to no political change. The table below summarizes main rallies and marches which are usually considered as part of the FFE movement:

<b>Date</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Cities<sup>10</sup></b>	<b>App. number of participants (in thousands)<sup>11</sup></b>
December 10, 2011	“For Fair Election”	Moscow, St. Petersburg	Moscow 85-100, St. Petersburg 10
December 24, 2011	“For Fair Election”	Moscow, St. Petersburg	Moscow 120, St. Petersburg 5
February 4, 2012	“For Fair Election”	Moscow, St. Petersburg	Moscow 100, St. Petersburg 25
February 25, 2012	“For Fair Election”	St. Petersburg	St. Petersburg 20
February 26, 2012	“For Fair Election” (St.Petersburg), “Big Whire Ring” (Moscow)	Moscow, St. Petersburg	Moscow 25, St. Petersburg 5
March 5, 2012	“For Fair Election”	Moscow, St. Petersburg	Moscow 25, St. Petersburg 5
March 10, 2012	“For Fair Election”	Moscow	Moscow 25

<sup>10</sup> The data here only include Moscow and St. Petersburg and does not include other cities in Russia, where the rallies also took place. However, as far as the is only devoted to new local activism emergence in Moscow and St. Petersburg only, the concentration here is on the sequence of events in these two cities.

<sup>11</sup> To give even approximate number of the rallies’ participants is not easy because nobody systematically collected these numbers. After each rally, Russian police published their numbers, and these numbers were always three or fourth times less than other evaluations. Opposition usually reported their numbers as well, but expectedly, these numbers usually were slightly bigger than journalists’ evaluations. There is no perfect strategy which can be used to provide a precise number of participants. Here, in the case of Moscow the evaluations of BBC Russia journalists are given, and in the case of St. Petersburg the evaluations of Fontanka newspaper journalists are given. Even if these evaluations probably do not reflect reality in a perfect way, they give a sense to a reader of how numbers were changing.

March 24, 2012	“For Fair Election”	St. Petersburg	St. Petersburg 2,5
May 6, 2012	“March of Millions”	Moscow	Moscow 70
May 9 – May 15, 2012	“Occupy Abay”	Moscow	Moscow 1,5-10
June 12, 2012	“March of Millions”	Moscow, St. Petersburg	Moscow 100, St. Petersburg 10
September 15, 2012	“March of Millions”	Moscow, St. Petersburg	Moscow 50, St. Petersburg 2,5-3
December 15, 2012	“March of Freedom”	Moscow, St. Petersburg	Moscow 2,5, St. Petersburg 0,5
January 13, 2013	“March Against Scoundreis”	Moscow, St. Petersburg	Moscow 15-20, St. Petersburg 2
May 6, 2013	“For Freedom”	Moscow	Moscow 25

In October 2012, the representatives of different oppositional forces organized the election into the so-called Opposition Coordination Council – the coalition which could represent the whole protest. The information about the election was distributed mainly through social networks, and the election itself was organized through digital media. Some scholars even argue that this “Internat election” was a cardinally new digital tactic of collective action. If at the very beginning of the movement, the protesters were organized as an ‘organizationally enabled connective action network,’ at the time of OCC emergence they were able to create “more centralized and more formalized “organizationally brokered collective action network” (Toepfl 2017: 8). The OCC was elected, but it, in fact, consisted of so many people with different political views that it could not work, in practice (Zhuravlev, Savelyeva, Alyukov 2015).

What are the existing explanations of the FFE movement emergence? Some scholars point out a decrease of the United Russia’s and Putin’s positions in the rankings on the eve of the FFE movement, linking it to the financial crisis and the public demand for changes (Rogov 2011, Belanovskii and Dmitriev 2011). Others stress the importance of political liberalization under the presidency of Medvedev as a factor of the rise in protest activity (Gel’man 2013). Also, the so-called “job swap” between Medvedev and Putin, when at the United Russia’s XII Party Congress, then-Prime Minister Putin’s announcement of his intention to enter presidential office again on

his third mandate provoked an indignation among many citizens, according to scholars (Gudkov et al. 2012).

The set of other factors contributed to the FFE movement emergence was also analyzed by scholars. According to the theories of “colour revolutions”, post-electoral protests usually happen when the level of electoral fraud (or a noticeable change in this level) is perceived as higher than in the previous elections. An unexpected level of fraud arouses peoples’ indignation and they come to the streets (Tucker 2007, Polese and Beacháin 2011). However, while there was relatively more electoral malpractice during this election, in comparison with the previous one, the electoral fraud of 2011 was not unexpected by the electorate. As Volkov argues, “It is not the fraud, per se, that has become news and a revelation, but rather aggravated attention to this issue and the particular actions undertaken by an active part of the society” (Volkov 2012). Margarita Zavadskaya and Natalya Savelyeva explain this visible paradox, thus proposing one more explanation of the causes of mass protests:

“The mass media, opposition leaders and the politicized blogosphere created an opportunity for prospective protesters to reframe their participation in elections as a “personal matter” by endowing the very act of voting with moral weight. This is why even mostly expected falsifications created a moral shock, which was primarily linked not with the gap between expectations and reality, but with the personal experience of living through this reality.” (Zavadskaya and Savelyeva, forthcoming).

While the FFE movement seemed to be sudden for both supporters and adversaries at that time, it is now evident that preliminary work conducted by the oppositional leaders significantly contributed to this mobilization. For example, after unsuccessful efforts to mobilize people to protest against electoral fraud in 2007-2008, the main non-parliamentary oppositional parties (among them: “Solidarity”, “Left Front”, “United Civic Front”, and those that emerged in 2011 - “PARNAS” and “Democratic Choice”) started to prepare for the next electoral cycle in advance. Thus, “Solidarity” and “Left Front” tried to support the grassroots movement, especially in Russian regions, expecting that later they could mobilize these people to participate in a political protest. Some of the non-parliamentary oppositional parties were successful in establishing friendly relations with several parliamentary deputies (Surkichanova 2014).

In interviews given to independent media (which are not directly controlled by the State) in 2011, the representatives of the non-parliamentary opposition discussed possible fraud in the parliamentary election in December 2011. Despite the fact that these media were not very popular, many citizens of big cities expected the electoral fraud to take place, as has been already been mentioned above. Thus, according to Levada Centre opinion poll conducted in August, 2011, 57% of respondents thought that the fraud in the future election would be for the benefit of party of power (Volkov 2012). The oppositional forces tried to elaborate the common

strategy of voting at the forthcoming elections in order to promote it in media. However, they could not agree. Finally, four different voting strategies were advertised by oppositional leaders in the media and on social networks on the eve of the FFE: to vote for any party except of the party of power (“the United Russia”), to spoil a ballot (for example, by crossing it out), to take a ballot away from voting station, or to boycott the election. Alexey Navalny, one of the future leaders of the protest and just a well-known blogger at that time, also agitated for people to participate in the elections as observers in order to prevent or at least to document fraud. Thus, the preliminary work done by the non-parliamentary oppositional actors should be taken into account in order to explain “sudden” rise of protests.

Social networks which provided the protesters with the channels for communication can be definitely distinguished as a separate factor of the FFE movement emergence. As it was mentioned above, it was because of the intensive discussion about the strategies of voting in social networks that a lot of people endowed the very act of voting with moral weight. And when their morally endowed vote have not been counted, they felt indignant (Zavadskaya and Savelyeva, forthcoming). Their indignation resulted in public action due in no small way to the information about protest actions distributed through social networks. Already on December, 4, the day of the election, the first activists came to the city center in Moscow and St. Petersburg and started to post their pictures in Vkontakte and Facebook. The posts attracted more protesters, and the mass rally “sudenny” happened on the next day.

Initially, the government reacted to the protest movement by anti-oppositional propaganda on TV (all the rallies are sponsored by our western enemies) and by holding pro-government “protest” rallies (counter-mobilization). Also, as some scholars show, social networks were widely used by pro-government actors in order to shift “the perceived balance of popular support and legitimacy toward the government and away from the opposition movement” (Spaiser et al. 2017: 3). Some time later, the state started to implement repressions to the most active rallies’ participants – which are described in detail in the next section of this chapter.

Analyzing the FFE mobilization in its dynamic, scholars point out at the changes in the repertoire of action starting from March 2012. Thus, as Virginia Lasnier shows that, “during the first three months of the mobilization, demonstrative actions represented the overwhelming majority of the FFE events organized - 92 percent of all events. During the demobilization period (from March to August 2012), the proportion of demonstrative actions fell to 53 percent and direct actions, mainly composed of tent-cities and hunger strikes, increased from 7 to 43 percent” (Lasnier 2017b: 139). However, they do not pay attention to the fact that not only the repertoire of action but also the very type and scale of involvement was changed in that period of time, and this happened when some former participants of the FFE movement organized local activists groups. Two particular phenomena that emerged from the FFE movement were of crucial importance for this change.

### **3.3. Expansion of Real Deeds Rhetoric and Politicization of Election Observation**

The first phenomenon crucial for the emergence of post-protest local activism was an expansion of so-called “real deeds” rhetoric<sup>12</sup> at the FFE rallies. The origins of this rhetoric can be traced to concrete “close-to-home” one-issue activism, which was the primary mode of collective action in Russia on the eve of the FFE movement, and which was discussed in detail in Chapter I. In this rhetoric, concrete “real deeds” were opposed to abstract “politics” in a similar way. However, if “close-to-home” one-issue mobilizations before the FFE protest happened around personally important for the activists issues, “real deeds” rhetoric presupposed the same concrete actions producing outcomes beneficial to society at large. For example, if before the FFE movement, activists could fight for renovation of playgrounds because they had children and the playground was close to their home, “real deeds” rhetoric at the FFE rallies presupposed that it is important to fight for renovation of playgrounds in one’s neighborhood even if one does not have children – this action will lead to the concrete results which are beneficial for the local community in general. The main characteristic of “deed” in order to it to be “real” was its possibility to lead to the concrete result in short-term perspective which one can touch or see. That is why, for example, to fix a bench is a “real deed” because one can literally touch a new bench, but to observe a voting procedure at the polling stations is also a “real deed” because one can see and prevent falsifications, and can see the numbers of votes for candidates at the end of the voting day. In such a way, expectedly, protest “for fair election” is not a “real deed” activity in itself, because it does not lead to concrete results in short-term perspective.

The “real deeds” is the translation of Russian expression “*realnye dela*” which is used by local activists themselves to describe what they do in opposition to politics (and which can be also translated as “getting real things done”, however, “real deeds” seems to be more proper translation as far as “*realnye dela*” is basically the adjective (*realnye*, real) plus the noun (*dela*, deeds or things). This expression is very precise and thus is used as an analytical concept to name the particular type of activists’ rhetoric referring to concrete and visible / touchable achievements.

The FFE movement was mostly manifested by nationwide rallies, and a nationwide protest rally is a form of political activity opposite to “real deeds.” Interestingly, the “real deeds” rhetoric was popular at the FFE protest at the same time. First, public leaders of the protest promoted “real deeds” in their blogs, encouraging people not only visit protest rallies but to do something concrete and useful like helping independent municipal deputies in their neighborhoods or observing an election. Second, the

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<sup>12</sup> Again, “rhetoric” or “ethic” and not “ideology” are used here because the dissertation does not refer to a phenomenon as general as “ideology”. “Real deeds” rhetoric is rather one of the products of Russian apolitical “ideology” and the analysis of the latter is beyond the scope of this research.

worthiness of “real deeds” rhetoric in its opposition to “pure protest” without positive goals was widely discussed in independent (not controlled by government) media which were the only media used by protest participants. Third, as a consequence of the first two points, ordinary protest participants, especially being disappointed in rallies leading to no visible results, discussed and considered the possibility of “real deeds” activity.

In this way, when people were tired of “meaningless” activities leading to no practical protest actions, some of them turned to more concrete and practically oriented “real deeds” activities, and the new local activism was of one them. Thus, the willingness of activists to do “real deeds” and not just to protest is crucially important for the understanding of how the new local activism became possible.

The next phenomenon, which deserves special attention, is the politicization of election observation. In order to understand what happened in 2011, it is essential to turn back to 1989, when election observation rights were first introduced as part of electoral law, and to trace the history of it. In 1989, RSFSR<sup>13</sup> electoral law enabled the representatives of the workforce and civic organizations to be present at polls and to monitor the process of voting. However, the very term of “observer” appeared in electoral legislation only in 1993. Civic organizations had a right to send their representatives to monitor elections until 2005, when this right was called off (Skokova 2015). Since then, and thus, in accordance with the electoral legislation, “every political party whose representatives participate in an election had the right to designate observers. Every citizen of the Russian Federation who has a voting right can be designated as an observer.<sup>14</sup>”

Until 2011, election monitoring was not a practice of civil society, neither de jure nor de facto. De jure civic organizations had no right to observe and to control voting processes. De facto, the practice of observation, itself, was not widespread. Some political parties were able to send many people to monitor elections, but it was a gainful activity. Thus, the observers, mostly retirement-age women, usually considered election observation as a side job rather as an activist practice. A few civil society organizations, such as the well-known organization “Golos” (Russian word for “vote”), made agreements with political parties and sent their activists to monitor elections in order to prevent electoral fraud. While being truly activist, this practice was thought to be narrow in the sense of the number of people involved.

As has been discussed above, significant preliminary work was done by opposition leaders in 2011, contributing to the emergence of the mass protest rallies at the end of the year. Among other things, they called upon concerned citizens to become election observers during the Parliamentary election in December 2011, and to monitor and prevent electoral fraud. It is noteworthy that opposition leaders did not imply that preventing electoral

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<sup>13</sup> Russian Soviet Federated Socialistic Republic

<sup>14</sup> FL №20, URL: [http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons\\_doc\\_LAW\\_159349/ca9f9d6f9acbd610bb8adb69b38b1b92b36b19cf/](http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_159349/ca9f9d6f9acbd610bb8adb69b38b1b92b36b19cf/) (date of access 24.07.2018).

fraud would help their political allies, but would put a stronger emphasis on electoral performance. They also insisted that it was a civic duty of every concerned citizen, with any political preferences or without them, in order to make the very procedure of the election fairer, and not allow the party of power to win using electoral falsifications. Parliamentary opposition parties sent, not just their adherents, but anyone who was willing to volunteer in election observation to the polls. In the election of December 2011, election observation became a widespread activist practice for the first time in the history of RSFSR and Russia. Thousands of people came to polling stations to monitor elections and to record and prevent falsifications, not being the supporters of any political party and sometimes not even being interested in politics at all.

Right after the Parliamentary elections in December 2011, photo- and video evidence of mass falsifications were distributed in media and social networks on the Internet. People, having obtained factual evidence of violations, learned that their personal vote had been stolen, and came to the streets to protest against this (Zavadskaya and Savelyeva, forthcoming). Election observation turned out to be an effective tool for “proving” authority in power dishonesty and thus, of people’s mobilization. Public leaders of the FFE protest continued to call upon the protesters to become election observers at both federal and regional/local elections.

Thus, in March 2012, even more people (about 400 thousand in total, Skokova 2015) came to the voting stations to monitor the Presidential election. Their decision was influenced both by the direct appeal of protest public leaders and by their own desire to get concrete and “real” things done, which has been discussed above. Not only the number of election observers has grown comparing to the time before the FFE movement, but also their repertoire of action has extended: the newly created organizations of observers started to distribute agitation videos, mobilizing citizens to volunteer in the election, to work out and distribute textbooks for observers, to create coordinative groups helping to observers in many administrative districts, and so forth (Skokova 2015). Starting from December 2011, election observation as a practice has become politicized: it became both a part of the struggle with the authority in power and a widespread practice of civic participation. The civic institution of election observation which had existed in Russia since 1989 but was “empty” for a long time, was finally filled by truly civic content and meaning on the eve and during the FFE protest.

For the first time, future local activists met each other in the voting polls in their neighborhoods, where they were monitoring the Presidential elections. After they experienced a feeling of solidarity and unity, being involved in short-term concrete collective action together, some of them decided to continue their activity and created local activist groups. However, before proceeding to the history of the emergence of post-protest local activism, the next part of this chapter shows how the FFE movement influenced protest politics in Russia, in general.

### **3.4. Political Landscape After the “For Fair Elections” Movement**

The FFE protest led to changes in both political opportunity structure and political culture in Russia. For the political opportunity structure, it became even less favorable for any mass political mobilization than it was on the eve of the FFE movement: repressions became stronger, thus shrinking opportunities for political mobilization, and general support of authority in power among the population started to grow. As was already mentioned above, the authorities reacted initially to the protest by strengthening pro-government propaganda and counter-mobilization movements. The people arrested during the first rallies were fined and freed in a few days. However, later the government started to implement severe repressions on the protesters.

Thus, almost thirty ordinary participants of the rally on May 6 2012 were arrested during 2012-2014; many of them got sentences of several years. Most of these people were not professional activists, and they came to the rally for the first, second or third time in their life. The leader of the “Left Front” was found guilty in the “organization of mass disorders” and imprisoned for 4.5 years. In June 2012, the Parliament implemented federal law №65, increasing the penalty for the violation of rules of participation in rallies and complicating the procedure for receiving permission to organize a rally. Fifteen lawsuits were made against Alexey Navalny, one of the FFE movement leaders; he was under house arrest for 1.5 years. More than twenty criminal lawsuits were initiated against other active participants of the anti-Putin rallies. In February 2015 the leader of “PARNAS” party, Boris Nemtsov, was killed in the center of Moscow.

However, scholars note that the demobilization of former participants of the FFE movement started before the state turned to active repression. As Virginia Lasnier shows, using protest event analysis data, “rank-and-file activists, along with more moderate leaders, started to massively disengage from the movement immediately after the March 2012 presidential elections (micro-level), a trend that was particularly visible on the March 5 and March 10 protests compared to previous rallies<sup>15</sup>” (Lasnier 2017b: 125). Thus, Russian case repressions, themselves, explain neither demobilization nor the change the scale of the protest, which is discussed later.

Many political analysts point out a conservative turn of Russian public politics after the FFE movement. Thus, on July 2012 the so-called “foreign agent” federal law №121 was implemented. The law required NGOs receiving foreign funding and engaging in “political activity” to register and to declare themselves as foreign agents. A very loose definition of what

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<sup>15</sup> Moreover, Lasnier shows later on that “contrary to the regime's expectations, the harsh reaction toward the protesters seemed to have actually rebooted the FFE movement for a while, with cultural leaders re-engaging in the movement. For instance, some popular figures organized the March of Writers and Poets on May 13, which attracted about ten thousand people to the streets. In the midst of the repression, where many new laws aimed at restricting public protests and civil society were promoted by the regime, and even precipitously rushed through parliament before the June 12 event, the June rally still attracted close to 60,000 people in Moscow” (Lasnier 2017b: 166).

“political activity” allows the government to penalize even research centers studying society and politics (the government’s explanation was that they publish the results, which could possibly influence the work of state officials; thus, they are involved in politics). This led to the court procedures against NGOs involved in human rights advocacy, LGBT support, and other civic activities. So-called “Dima Yakovlev” federal law №272 implemented in January 2013 banned USA citizens from adopting children from Russia, despite the fact that the children adopted by USA citizens were mostly diagnosed with mental and other disorders. The important contribution to the conservative and nationalistic turn in Russian official political ideology was the annexation of the Crimean region from Ukrainian territory in March 2014. This act was highly supported by both Crimean citizens and most of the Russian population: it was perceived as the saving of the ethnic Russians living in Crimea from the Ukrainian nationalists by Putin personally. Despite the following economic sanctions imposed by Western countries, people started to feel that Russia was a strong player in the international arena. Even some of those who participated in the FFE movement in 2011-12 eventually became Putin’s supporters after the “reunion” with Crimea.

The situation with political culture is more complicated. On the one hand, the culture of apoliticism continued to define people’s relations with politics. However, during and after the FFE mobilization, it influenced the ways people became *involved in* public politics rather than *prevent* their participation in it (for more details, see: Alyukov et al. 2015). The FFE rallies were criticized for the vagueness of their agendas, for the moral language of claims and demands, for the unwillingness of protesters to create a clear identity, for their fear of political conflicts and so forth. At the same time, plenty of local initiatives organized by former participants and supporters of the FFE movement emerged in Russia’s big cities; Alexei Navalny started to hold his own youtube channel and discuss there protest politics on a regular basis; most of the states’ lawsuits mentioned above caused not so big, but still visible, protest rallies. Thus, public politics stopped being something extraordinary for the Russian citizens as it was before the FFE movement. Moreover, the new local activism, itself, led to crucial changes in the political culture in Russia, which will be described and analyzed in detail in the next chapters of the dissertation. At the end of the current chapter, the new local activism is shown to emerge from the FFE movement, with the emphasis on the history of creation of four particular local groups chosen for analysis.

### **3.5. The New Local Activism as a “Spin-off” Movement**

As we know from the social movement studies, “moments of madness” (i.e., big nation-wide protest movements) (Tarrow 1993) even when stopping, still leave their traces by producing a new repertoire of contention or new “spin-off” movements (Tarrow 1993, McAdam 1995). The new local activism can be seen in the following as a “spin-off” of the FFE movement. However, what local activists borrowed from the FFE rallies was

not a repertoire of contention, using the repertoire of one-issue protests popular before the FFE movement, but rather it was the very willingness to continue collective action and the “real deeds” ethic.

In order to understand how the new type of local activism initially emerged, it is necessary to come back to the very beginning of the FFE movement and to consider how “real deeds” rhetoric and politicization of election observation together contributed to the creation of local groups. When opposition leaders were agitating people to become election observers in the presidential election on March 4, 2012 thanks in no small part to “real deeds” ethics, many FFE movement participants responded to this call (Skokova 2015). Election observation was considered by the FFE movement activists as a “real deeds” practice, but, at the same time, not time-consuming activity. It was exactly this type of activity the activists were looking for.

In the Presidential election, concerned citizens who came to the polls to monitor them, tried to both prevent and to document electoral fraud. Some of them met each other through social networks before the election and organized coordination committees of observers in their neighborhoods. We see again that social networks were the tools which were effectively employed by former participants of the FFE movement to communicate to each other and to create coordination committees. Such committees included the observers themselves, lawyers, and mobile groups with cars who visited all the voting stations during the polling day and collected information about electoral fraud. It is important to understand that neighborhood or “municipal district” is the main unit of the electoral system in Russia and the lowest level of political power where it can be really controlled by the citizens. Thus, election observers changed the scale of collective action, not because they cared more about “close-to-home” environment, but simply because it was the only real possibility to influence authority in power and to prevent electoral fraud.

Yet, the presidential election turned out to be much fairer than the parliamentary one. There was less electoral fraud and the people faced the fact that Putin still had strong support among the population. The protests began to decline and less and less people gathered at every rally because the protesters saw less sense in the rallies. Moreover, the political opportunities for the mass protest shrank as repressions became stronger (see the previous section of this chapter). In this context, the “real deeds” ethics got a new impetus: some of the former election observers who have already met each other within the neighborhoods (just because “neighborhood” coincides with “municipal district” which is the main unit of electoral system) decided to continue their protest activity on the local level and in a more concrete form by organizing small activist groups. Rank-and-file protesters and sympathizers subsequently joined them.

On September 2013, a year later, the mayoral elections were held in Moscow. Alexey Navalny participated in these elections as a candidate. Although he had no chance to win, his office organized a huge campaign in the city in order to mobilize more participants for the broader oppositional movement. Many citizens (among them were those who participated in FFE

movement in 2012, but not only them) joined Navalny's electoral campaign by agitating for him on the streets in their neighborhoods, and delivering oppositional newspapers to their neighbors. The members of new local activist groups created in 2012 in Moscow participated in the campaign as well. As far as the electoral campaign was organized inside each of municipal districts in Moscow, it had a similar effect as the presidential elections in March 2012. Some ordinary participants of Navalny's campaign had gotten to know about already existing new civic activist groups in their neighborhoods, and subsequently joined them. Others decided to continue their activity after the elections were held, and organize new activist groups within their municipalities just as their counterparts did in March 2012.

Thus, in both cases within the electoral mobilization, the "core" of activists was formed. After the end of the electoral cycle, in the context of unfavorable political opportunities for the mass nationwide protests, these activists became involved in "real deeds" action. They have chosen a local scale, not because they were aware of "close-to-home" issues, but because the electoral system, itself, consists of a number of municipal districts where these people meet each other. "Real deeds" ethics were borrowed from the FFE and made the neighborhood look like a very suitable place and unit to apply their activities.

Most of the new local activist groups created by the former election observers and the participants of Navalny's electoral campaign, both in March 2012 and in September 2013, still exist nowadays. The members of such groups attend municipal assemblies, track various legislative bills promoted by municipal administrations, publish leaflets and newspapers dealing with local problems, the work of local administrations, and current political events, defend squares and parks threatened by infill construction, combat road expansion and struggle with other destructive invasions in their local environment. They also participated in municipal elections on September 14, 2014, but did not have a chance of winning due to the electoral fraud administered by the ruling party. All of them were not registered officially because activists thought that official status would impose a number of bureaucratic obligations and make them weaker in the struggle with the local authorities. However, all the groups created corporate chapters and tried to follow them. According to these chapters, everyone should be considered the part of "group" who participate in group's activity and group's meetings. Regular meetings where activists discussed current campaigns and future plans were held monthly.

As was stated above, the new local activism in Russia emerged in the context of political repressions and a conservative turn in Russian public politics, in other words, within the "closed" political opportunity structure (McAdam et al. 2001). Sometimes scholars describe the emergence of local and "apolitical" forms of activism mainly as a reaction to the "closed" political environment where more politicized forms of participation are too risky and costly (see, e.g., Thomson 2004). This model can be partly applied to the case of Russian post-protest local activism as well, however, the specificity of political opportunity structure itself cannot fully explain the creation of new local groups. First of all, the very emergence of the new local

activism can be traced back to March, 2012: at that time the authorities did not yet start to repress participants' rallies and did not adopt any of the laws listed above. Secondly, after some time, not only "political" anti-Putin protest participation but also the involvement in local activism became a high risk/high cost activity (in terms of McAdam 1990). Thus, political and civic participation became a not so extraordinary happening after the FFE movement, but it was still considered as a rather marginal phenomenon; those who choose to participate often should pay for it by breaking previous ties and becoming excluded from habitual social circles (what McAdam calls "social risks"). Moreover, although civic activism in Russia is officially welcomed, in practice it has become more and more dangerous: for instance, some leaders of the aforementioned groups were imprisoned, while others were under the surveillance of the state security services ("material" and "physical" risks). Finally, the participation in long-term local projects takes a lot of time and even money, which is not the case for regular participation in large political events because this is limited to the occasional visiting of rallies. That is why "closed" and unfavorable political opportunity structure is a necessary but not sufficient condition to explain the very fact of the emergence of the new local activism. Rather, as shown above, this fact should be explained by the influence of "real deeds" rhetoric promoted at the rallies, together with the politicization of election observation as happened on the eve and during the FFE protest. The explanation of "real deeds" rhetoric is the increase in people willingness to be able to influence things and to see the results of their influence, which overlaps with the people's fatigue with impotence in making any influence by just visiting the FFE rallies. Politicization of election observation has filled the "empty institution" of election monitoring by new civic meanings and made this practice an ideal implementation of the demand for "real deeds." As soon as structural opportunities opened by presidential electoral campaign allowed the FFE activists to meet each other within small neighborhoods, they started to use this opportunity to get real things done together.

Below the histories of the creation of the four particular local activist groups chosen for this research are analyzed in details. This step is necessary for the further situation of the activist biographies, not only within broader political context described above, but also within the narrower organizational context of their groups. At the end, a summary of the main theses of this chapter are made, and the conceptual model of the research is presented.

### **3.5.1. "Civic Association"**

"Civic Association" was created in March 2012 by the former election observers in one of the municipal districts in St. Petersburg (which is basically a small separate town very close the city). The coordination committee of observers was organized in the town on the eve of the elections, so most of the independent observers in the district knew each

other even before the presidential elections in 2012. All of them were participants or supporters of the FFE movement.

A week after the presidential elections, the Coordination committee organized a meeting in a public cafe with former observers in order to discuss their experience during the elections; around forty people came, all of them were residents of the town. At this meeting, someone (the activists cannot even remember who exactly he or she was) proposed “to stay together” and to do something else together – to just save the spirit of collectivity they had already experienced. Everybody supported this idea. The activists started to discuss a possible local agenda when someone told that the huge public park in their town was going to be partly destroyed by some business developer, the activists decided to struggle against the park destruction.

This was the very first campaign the activists became involved in; later they struggled against toxic factory construction, housing development in the natural park zone, a toxic trash dump, and so forth – thus, one-issue campaigns started to run one after another. They also took part in monthly public meetings with the local administration and tried to involve more and more ordinary citizens in these meetings. They regularly ran their blogs in social networks and after some time, they became known in their city. On September 2014 the group took the part in the local municipal elections by running almost ten candidates, but no one was able to win because of electoral fraud. While in 2012 all the activists had detected the conflict between “radical” and “moderate” members of their group which were arguing about group’s strategy in tactics, in 2015, this conflict was totally resolved. The activists did not see the contradiction between “real deeds” and “politics” anymore. They valued “real deeds” both for their own sake and as a necessary tool on the way to changing the political system in Russia.

Many of those who came to the first group meeting after the presidential election, left activism after a while. However, some of the former participants of the Bolotntya movement found the “Civic Association” page in social networks and joined it later. Several new members joined the group during the electoral campaign in September 2014. In Autumn 2015, the group consisted of around fifteen active members. In the very beginning of the “Civic Association’s” existence, it had two informal leaders. Later, one of them left the group, and one of the new members took over the leading position. There was no formal schedule of group meetings, but usually activists met regularly at least once a month. Most active members were also connected by friendship and thus, they could spend some free time together drinking and chatting.

### **3.5.2. “Headquarters”**

The “Headquarters” was initially organized as a coordination committee to help four independent candidates to run in the municipal election in a particular district in Moscow (the municipal election in Moscow

in 2012 was organized on the same day as the presidential one). There was actually one person who was the founder of this group. In January 2012 he found out from the media that municipal elections would take place in Moscow and that some independent candidates would take part in it. He looked for the information about his own municipal district on the Internet and found that there were as many as four oppositional candidates in the neighborhood. He got in touch with them and proposed to help them. Later he created the page on the social networks devoted to all four candidates simultaneously – the “Headquarters”. Some of the other participants of the FFE movement from the neighborhood joined the campaign. As a result of a well-organized electoral campaign, two of four candidates won the election and became municipal deputies.

A week after the election, former participants of the electoral campaign and electoral observers met to discuss the electoral results. During this meeting, they also decided to continue their activities within their municipal districts; they were very enthusiastic about this because they had actual disputes. After a while, one of the deputies preferred not to be associated with the “Headquarters”, while another one became the informal leader of the group.

The “Headquarters” activists were involved in the developing of urban upgrading projects every year. They struggled against the tax for capital housing repair that all the citizens were required to pay, the cutting down of public parks in the area, and so forth. The group regularly issued their own newspaper, which became well known in the neighborhood as the only source of meaningful information about the district. The activists did not only run the group’s blogs in social networks, but also created their own website. Many of them participated in Navalny’s electoral campaign in August-September 2013. At that time, almost ten new members joined the “Headquarters”.

The municipal deputy, the leader of the group, was under house arrest on false charges from Summer 2014 to Summer 2015. However, released from this, he continued his activity in the “Headquarters”. Similar to “Civic Association’s” members, the “Headquarters” activists were able to resolve the contradiction between the “political” goals of one of its members and the willingness of getting the real deeds of the others done in a few years. They united “real deeds” and “politics” in one single frame. It became impossible for them to imagine political struggle with party of power without “real deeds” in the neighbourhood, as well as to getting real things done, which they started to perceive senseless because it did not have regime change as a purpose.

In Autumn, 2015, the group consisted of around twenty active participants. There was no schedule of working meetings, but usually activists met at least twice a month. Some of them also spent their leisure time together.

### **3.5.3. “People’s Council”**

The members of this group first met during Navalny's electoral campaign in August-September, 2013. Most of them were former participants of the FFE movement and helped Navalny in their neighborhoods. Their motivation was not to support Navalny personally, but rather, to do something concrete and "oppositional" at the same time, and Navalny's campaign gave them such an opportunity. There was one independent municipal deputy among them. In Autumn - Spring 2013-2014, these people stayed in touch with each other and sometimes participated in local campaigns led by the independent deputy. Some of them even became close friends. In practice, they had acted together since Navalny's campaign, but then they decided to create a "group" (with a name, corporate charter, blog in social networks and so forth) only in the late Spring 2014. Now most of group's members mention the municipal deputy as the author of this idea. The activists were also inspired by the experience of local groups from other Moscow municipalities.

Among the campaigns the "People's Council" organized were the struggle against the parking zone near metro stop, the stopping of selling alcohol near educational institutions, the fee for capital housing repair, the waste incineration plant, and the toxic trash dump. The activists won plenty of battles over local urban infrastructure and thus forced the local administration to repair children's playgrounds and parks and to develop public transportation routes in the area. The "People's Council" also issued their own local newspaper, ran blogs in social networks, and took part in the municipal election in 2017. In autumn, 2015, the activists has seen no opposition between getting real things done and the more broad, opposition goals. However, they told about the conflict between these two parties they had right after the group's emergence.

In Autumn, 2015 the group consisted of around fifteen active members. There were three leaders in the "People's Council". Two of them were independent municipal deputies, while the third one was just an active local resident. The members of the group met each other twice a month and kept the minutes of every meeting. Many of them became friends and spent leisure time together; for example, they used to invite each other to their birthdays celebrations.

#### **3.5.4. "Public Council"**

The history of "Public Council" is exactly the same as that of the "Civic Association. The coordination committee consisted of the FFE movement participants and was organized in one of the municipal districts in Moscow on the eve of the presidential election in Spring 2012. After the elections, the former observers met each other to discuss their experience and decided "to stay together" and to do "real deeds" in their neighborhood. As well as the "Civic Association's members, they found out that the big public park in the neighborhood was partly destroyed by the business developer. They decided to organize a public campaign to save the park. During this campaign, the activists from the "Public Council" met another

activist group struggling against park destruction. They collaborated with this group but did not band with it because its activity was devoted to the park issue only, while “Public Council” was interested in much broader set of issues including the monitoring of local authority’s activity.

Apart from the park defense campaign, the activists were involved in the struggle against outdoor advertising, hostels in dwelling houses, and the construction of a church on the land of the public park in their neighborhood. They won a number of battles over local urban infrastructure, thus forcing the local administration to develop a public transportation system in the area and improve several areas and squares. They monitored the activity of local authorities and issued their own regular newspaper. “Public Council” held a working meeting once or twice a month and these meetings took place in public cafes or at the homes of the group’s members. In Autumn 2015, it consisted of around eight to ten members. However, none of them was active enough, because the group was in crisis at that time. Some of the participants thought the group should be totally apolitical in public, while others insisted that in some cases, such as municipal elections, they should agitate for oppositional candidates. These two parties could not find a compromise and were disappointed.

Thus, there are plenty of similarities between these four groups, not only their origins but also the problems they had deal with, the means and strategies they used, even the schedule of their meetings and the approximate numbers of active members. Most importantly, three of them were able to negotiate the opposition between the apolitical and the political, which had determined activist political culture in Russia for more than twenty years.

It is noteworthy that these groups are not strongly related to each other: many of the activists know that there are some similar initiatives, but they do not know exactly what their fellows do. In other words, these similarities could not be explained by the fact of adoption of eachothers’ practices. That is why we could speak about these groups as those representing one phenomenon which emerged after and out of the FFE movement and this needs to be explained in this context.

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After the analysis made in this chapter, an explanation of the emergence of *the very fact of local activism emergence* can be given. Both structural and cultural factors made the new local activism in Russia possible. More specifically, structural factors such as the political opportunity structure which was unfavorable for mass nationwide mobilizations, the end of electoral cycle within which “core” of activists was formed, and the ways of how the electoral system is organized (“municipal district” as a primary electoral unit) all created one set of necessary conditions for the new local activism. Cultural factors, that is, the “real deeds” ethics born in the FFE movement as result of the culture of apoliticism in Russia, together with the politicization of election observation and the protesters' fatigue with senselessness of rallies where they could

influence nothing are responsible for another set of necessary conditions. These structural and cultural factors, taken together, may explain the very fact of local activism's emergence from the FFE movement.

However, not only the very fact of the emergence of post-protest local activism but also *its specific character*, that is, its ability to unite "real deeds" and "politics" in single frame, needs to be explained. The next chapters argue that an explanation of this change cannot be given without taking into account the ways of socialization and the individual involvement in activism of the people who established these new local groups. The next two chapters are devoted to this explanation.

## CHAPTER IV. ACTIVIST CAREERS AND POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION OF LOCAL ACTIVISTS

This chapter consists of five sections. First, the social background of local activists is analyzed and compared with the data available about the social background of the FFE movement protesters in general. Beyond that, the results of this analysis are situated in the scholarly discussions about the role of the middle class or *intelligencia* in the “For Fair Elections” protest.

Second, the patterns or channels of involvement into the local activism which were common for all local activists are traced. These patterns highlight the institutional conditions created by the FFE movement that were necessary for the emergence of local activism. The analysis also shows how activist biographies feed into such institutional conditions.

Third, the four different types of activist careers behind this visible homogeneity are identified through 3-steps analysis, the representatives of these careers are the “doers”, “volunteers”, “oppositionists” and “oppositional thinkers”. To identify the careers, at first, the materials of each individual interview were synthesized, summarizing their specific biographical trajectories and motives. Then “individual cases” were compared and people who described similar experiences of events before the “For Fair Elections” movement were clustered as representatives of the same type of “career”. Finally, the ways of how people describe experiences that were defined as common for the representatives of each type of career were analyzed. For more details on the procedure of categorization see section 3.4, “Data Analysis.” The names chosen for the career types are the metaphors which reflect the main type of activity the interviewees were involved in and were developing during their socialization before the FFE movement. “Doers” describes the people who have been active since childhood in different spheres, including school and university, and who always wanted “to do” something concrete and real. “Volunteers” refers to a similar type of trajectory with the difference that these people became involved in the charity activity within the sphere of civil society at some point of their careers before the FFE movement. “Oppositionists” is obviously the name for the people who had actual political experience in opposition politics before the FFE protest. Finally, the name, “oppositional thinkers” refers to the trajectories presupposing the development of oppositional attitudes long before the FFE movement, without actual involvement in politics. Fourth, the exceptional trajectories that do not fit any type of career are analyzed, that is, the involvement in local activism in order to solve “close-to-home” issues, and the involvement because of the event of the FFE movement only. These trajectories, especially, the first one, are discussed in the literature as typical modes of involvement in local activism, but they are not peculiar for post-protest activism. Thus, this analysis allows the highlighting of the specificity of the new Russian local activism in comparison with other types of local activism. Fifth, empirical results of this chapter are summarized showing, basically, that both pre-

protest social experience and the experience of the event of the FFE movement itself should be taken into account in order to explain long-term post-protest local activism. The former disposed certain people to activism in general, while the later changed the content and the meaning of activity in which these people were involved in before it was connected to non-overlapping experiences and careers. That is how the new local activism not only just became possible but acquired its specific politicized character.

#### **4.1. Social Background of Local Activists**

##### **4.1.1. General Socio-Economic Characteristics**

The members of new local initiatives that emerged after the FFE movement have a similar social background, as the analysis of the data collected has shown. Thus, with some minor exceptions (five of them have parents with vocational training only); they came from highly educated families. Most of these families belonged to the so-called Soviet intelligentsia, with one or both parents working as scientists, schoolteachers, university professors, engineers, doctors, or librarians. Others also have parents with higher university education and are occupied as employees in the private sector (three), or in the military (two). Almost half of the interviewees studied in specialized, high-level schools, among them special schools for English, grammar and classical schools, schools with intensified instruction in different areas, and special secondary schools at the universities. Almost all the members of the new local activist groups that participated in this research have higher university education themselves (with the exception of three of them . One was still a pupil, another one was a student and the last one has entered the university but then left it on her own volition), and thus are the second or even the third generation bearers of higher university education.

The dataset has twenty-two males and fourteen females. Half of the interviewees were married, and most of them had children; the other half were still single. Most of the local activists in the sample lived alone or with their wives/husbands, with the exception of seven persons who shared the apartments with parental families (two out of seven were schoolchildren and one of seven was a student). Most of them had a monthly income starting from 30 000 rubbles and more (app. \$500, which is a more than average income in St. Petersburg and Moscow) and one member of the family, with the exception five persons, lived in rather poor families.

##### **4.1.2. Generation**

It is noteworthy that almost all the members of local activist groups analyzed were close to each other in age<sup>16</sup>. They were born in the late Soviet period (from the late 1970s to the late 1980s), spent their childhood in the Soviet Union, and finished secondary school and built their professional careers in the new Russia. Sociologist Karl Mannheim (1952) in his classical work on generations writes that it is not enough to share age and social and cultural region in order to be the representative of the same generation:

“Individuals of the same age, they were and are, however, only united as an actual generation in so far as they participate in the characteristic social and intellectual currents of their society and period, and in so far as they have an active or passive experience of the interactions of forces which made up the new situation.” (Mannheim 1952: 304).

Most of the interviewees can remember a soviet childhood, and especially the experience their families went through after the breakup of the USSR, “shock therapy” and neoliberal pro-market reforms. As one of them explains,

“In Soviet time my parents, were *inteligencia*, specialists with scientific degrees, and they were involved in many kinds of activity. It was really a good level [of life]. And then in the nineties, it has all came to nothing” (Denis, male, born in 1987, “Headquarter”).

However, the secondary socialization of most interviewees took place after “it had all came to nothing” in the context of the culture of apoliticism – thus, this culture has influenced their growing-up in a more or less similar way. Their families were mostly concerned about basic living conditions – income, food, and clothes – and considered politics as something rather obstructive for their daily life. Answering the question of whether politics has been discussed in her family during her childhood, one woman explains:

“We didn’t discuss anything like this. My parents thought that this was not important, this was not interesting. It was more important to think what we would eat tomorrow - what we would eat, and not who we would vote for” (Galina, female, 1986, “Headquarters”).

The FFE movement was the very first mass nationwide protest they saw and the very first their own political experience (for all except the representatives of “oppositionists”’ career which will be explained later on). At the moment of the FFE protest, they were between twenty-two and thirty-five years old, and they felt young enough to be both concerned with

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<sup>16</sup> Only three of interviewees were older than the main cohort – they were born in the late sixties, and only two of them were younger – they were born in the middle of nineties. Both these cases are rather exceptional for post-protest local activism in general.

and to be responsible for the future transformations in the country. With all this said, most of the interviewees could be called not just the people of the same age, but representatives of the same generation.

#### **4.1.3. Social Composition of the New Local Activist Groups: Middle Class, Inteligencia or... ?**

The data from the interviews with the local activists are more similar than data from opinion polls about the FFE movement protesters in general. However, they can still be compared to reach preliminary conclusions. Among the participants of the first big rally on December 24, 2011, there were 59% of males and 39% of females (it became 59% and 38% a year and a half later, at the last big rally of the FFE movement) (Levada-Center 2013). It is interesting that this totally corresponds with the gender balance among local activists (61% of males and 39% of females in the dataset), which means that both men and women from the FFE movement took part in local activism equally. In other words, there is nothing gender-specific in local activism.

As for the age distribution, the majority of protesters at first big rally were in between 25 and 39 (31%). However, the other age groups were represented as well (24% of 18-24 years olds and 23% of 40-54 years olds) (Levada-Center 2013). A majority of local activists represented the same age cohort, but the number was considerably larger. Thus, 86% of the interviewees were between 22 and 35 years old. 62% of first big rally's protesters had higher education, while as many as 90% of local activists had this level.

The question of who came to the streets protesting electoral fraud is discussed in scholarly and expert literature, referring mainly to two main concepts: middle class and *inteligencia*. Can these concepts be useful for describing the new local activism members, and if it can, what does it tell us about new local activism?

At first, both scholars and media claimed that it is mostly the middle class who represent the majority of the FFE movement protesters. The results of the opinion polls presented above have been used by many scholars to prove the middle class hypothesis: most of the protesters not only had a higher university education but were also occupied as white collar workers and businessmen, or were the students (Levada-Center 2013). Based on this data, Graeme Robertson (2012), the famous researcher on Russian politics, claimed that these were mostly university-educated and middle and upper income people, that is, middle class, who came to the FFE protest criticizing corruption and the loss of civil rights. Similarly, Nikolai Petrov (2012) argued that while for a long time middle class was dependent from the Russian state, it was at least ten years before the FFE movement, as a result of growth of post-industrial economy sector the middle class representatives, started to be less dependent on the state. This was one of the reasons why they came to the streets protesting against corruption and

fraud. However, Petrov added, being advanced in intellectual and social aspects, protesters were infantile in that political sense (Petrov 2012).

However, other scholars questioned the applicability of the “middle class” term as too simplistic or just incorrect. Thus, Alexei Levinson (2012) insisted that it was not the middle class claiming its own particular political rights who came to the streets, but the society in general, because the society simply did not want to live a miserable life anymore. Alexander Bikbov (2012), a Russian sociologist, has written several articles criticizing the efforts of scholars and experts to describe the protesters as middle class. The interviews he and his colleagues took at the rallies showed that, first, the objective social characteristics of the protesters varied a lot, and second, the protesters rarely described themselves as middle class. Those who did, Bikbov claimed, just were trying to find their own place in the social structure, which was really unclear for them. The application of the middle class term to describe the protesters makes no sense, according to Bikbov, because the system of social distinctions is vague in contemporary Russia, and because the protesters did not have any demand for social representation as a group or a “class” (Bikbov 2012).

Other researchers tried to attack the problem of who came to the streets from a different angle: they proposed typologies of the protesters that were based on characteristics besides social-economic ones. Thus, Olga Kryshstanovskaya, a Russian sociologist, divided all the protesters into eight categories: professional revolutionaries, celebrities and media persons, family members of professional revolutionaries, bloggers, students, intelligencia, marginals and freelancers, and politicized pensioners (Samsonova 2012). Vladimir Shlapentokh argued that these were intelligencia people who came to the FFE rallies, as far as intelligencia was the motor of social change through Russian history, and took this role in 2011-12 as well (Rol' intelligencii... 2012). Mikhail Alekseevsky, an anthropologist, analyzing the social background of protesters with hand-made posters, showed that at least 68% of them were intelligencia or young professionals with higher education (Alekseevsky 2012).

Other scholars, however, questioned the applicability of the term intelligencia to the FFE movement protesters. Boris Dubin argued that the protesters in 2011-12 were obviously different from those we called intelligencia in the 1960s. Entrepreneurs and top-managers, overrepresented among the FFE movement protesters were very far socially from the “soviet intelligencia” (Rol' intelligencii... 2012). Another scholarly opinion is that educated people from the FFE rallies were different from soviet intelligencia, while being similar with Russian intelligencia at the end of XIX and beginning of the XX century (Zolotarev 2017). Finally, some scholars claimed that there is no intelligencia at all in contemporary Russian society. This social stratum does not exist any more because of the demolition of soviet social stratification system and the loss of former intelligencia people of their social function (Ryvkina 2006). But what is this social function?

First of all, “intelligencia” is a very specific Russian phenomenon, referring to a group of people who perceive themselves in this way and who

are perceived as “intelligencia” by others (Fedotov 1990). The rise of the intelligencia coincides with the end of XIX and the beginning of XX centuries when public discussions about the role of the intelligencia in social and historical changes took place (Rol' intelligencii... 2012). In soviet times, the role of the intelligencia is usually described by scholars as serving the soviet political systems, which does not necessarily mean loyalty to the authority in power. “Serving” in this sense refers to the implementation of a soviet utopian project, which can be critical towards particular elements of communist party politics (Ryvkina 2006). Soviet intelligencia, at the same time, was never a part of ruling elite. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, there was no similar mission for the former intelligencia. Moreover, the soviet intelligencia were calling for democratic changes, but never expected the crisis these changes finally led to. Faced with the actual reality of the new Russia, the soviet intelligencia, as Rozalina Ryvkina put it, “became numb, and this was a consequence of the exhaustion of its historical role” (Ryvkina 2006: 141). In post-soviet Russia, the former soviet intelligencia were thus divided into those who became a part of new ruling class, those who became a part of the under-privileged people, and businessmen (Ryvkina 2006). What the FFE movement protests showed, however, was that in the 2010s, well-educated professionals stopped attributing their success to the merits of the political regime and started to criticize it (Dubin 2009). Moreover, well-educated young professionals who came to post-protest local activism, seemed to be able to see exactly how Russian society needed to be changed, and they seemed to have an utopian project of prospective social changes. Does that mean that the new intelligencia has been formed out of the core participants of the FFE movement?

No matter the answer to this question and the applicability of the intelligencia and middle class terms, in general, for describing the FFE movement protesters, it can definitely be seen that young, well-educated people were overrepresented at the rallies. However, the proportion of young well-educated people is even higher among the post-protest local activists. This means that these were the very core of the FFE movement protesters who were visible and highly represented in media, and who came to do the long-term routine activist work after the rallies began to decline, and who finally were able to make a real change in the activist political culture. We still do not really know who these people were, besides that they were educated and not poor. This dissertation sheds light on this question.

#### ***4.2. Common Patterns of Involvement in Local Activism***

Apart from similar social backgrounds, the members of new local initiatives also shared the channels through which they were involved in local activism. All of them, with only one exception, took part in or strongly supported the FFE movement in 2011-12. Participating in or watching nationwide mass rallies, they realized that they were not alone in the sense that there were other people with similar attitudes towards the existing political regime. Similar attitudes do not mean any similar political views –

most of them had no political views. Similar attitudes mean rather a similar feeling that authority in power is corrupt, and that the political system should be more “fair”. This feeling of unity with others was the most important and striking experience that the future local activists went through during the FFE movement. The words of one of the activists give us a good description of this picture:

“The first rally was a rather emotional one. It felt like a holiday. It felt like you hold together with everyone. It’s kind of the same during the New Year celebration, when you walk on the street, and wish everyone happy New Year, and everyone smiles at you and gladly answers you. That is, it is kind of a unity with people and everyone is on the same page. And during the FFE movement, at the rally, it’s the same. Everyone is on the same page. Everyone understands why we are here and everyone is glad that we are so many people.” (Gleb, born in 1984, male, “Headquarters”).

It is noteworthy that this feeling of unity might include both a feeling of unity with people with similar social and cultural background and, on the opposite side, a feeling of unity with quite a difference in terms of background, but still gathering together individuals. The words of one female activist from “Headquarters” can be an illustration of the first tendency:

“We were amazed when we came to the first rally. First of all, we were amazed at the people who came there. These were the people of our social circle; they were totally acceptable, just normal, nice people, very gentle, very intelligent.” (Alexandra, born in 1975, female, “Headquarters”).

At the same time, other people emphasized that it was rather different people who came to the rally but they were united by the same vision and ideas. As one male activist from “Civic Association” states,

“Despite the fact that all the men were totally different, they were united by the same aspiration after the elections. There was something uniting, and that’s an interesting thing. But, again, they were totally different.” (Ivan, born in 1987, male, “Civic Association”).

In March 2012, when the political opposition launched a new electoral campaign aimed at persuading the FFE movement protesters to become election observers within their municipal districts, some of the future local activists joined. Independent observation did not prevent Vladimir Putin from winning the election, but a lot of active people within particular neighborhoods met each other and decided to continue collective action together. As is shown elsewhere (Zhuravlev, Savelyeva, Erpyleva 2015), this decision was based on two aspirations. First, people wanted to

preserve and extend the experience of unity they had during the FFE movement and saw local activism as a continuation of nationwide mobilization. Second, they planned to do something real as opposed to the politics of the FFE rallies, which were remote from people's specific needs and led to no practical changes. As one of the local activists puts it,

“I began to understand the senselessness of what was happening in the form it was happening - that rallies were pointless. If I had to choose between attending a dubious, unauthorized rally with no clear point, or taking to the streets with [leftist protest leader Sergei] Udaltsov's red flags, and really trying to do something in my neighborhood, I would choose to try and do something in my neighborhood.” (Luba, born in 1995, female, “Headquarters”).

In August and September, 2013, Navalny launched a campaign in the Moscow mayoral election. Many former participants in the FFE movement mobilized to work for his campaign in their municipal districts and organized themselves around particular, concrete goals. They campaigned near their homes and met other Navalny supporters in their neighborhoods. Navalny's election campaign had a similar effect as the presidential election on post-protest local activism: many of those who worked as part of his campaign decided to join existing local activist groups in their neighborhoods after the elections or to organize new ones. That was how another group of interviewed activists became members of local groups.

Thus, election observation in Moscow and St.Petersburg in March 2012, and Navalny's electoral campaign in Moscow in August/September 2013, both institutionally designed in a way to unite people within the same neighborhood, served as two main channels of involvement in post-protest local activism. Nevertheless, despite the similar social background and channels of involvement the members of new local groups had, the analysis of the interviews allows the identification of four types of careers leading to the new local activism behind this visible homogeneity.

### ***4.3. Four Types of Activist Careers***

#### **4.3.1. “Doers”**

“And I have understood that my activity should be more practical. In fact, I'm itching to do something practical. The whole of our family is like this (Leda, female, born in 1958, “Public Council”).

“I have a lot of wishes. What professions haven't, I tried to understand! But the main thing for me was always to do something with a productive element, something active, something with creativity and I've

accomplished it.” (Marina, female, born in 1982, “Civic Association”).

The career of “doers<sup>17</sup>” included thirteen individual trajectories: four from the Civic Association, six from the Headquarters, two from the People’s Council, and one from the Public Council. There were seven men and six women among the “doers”. They represented three different age groups: the first group were born between 1960 – 1975 and thus spent most of their childhood in USSR, the second group were born between 1982 – 1989 and thus spent at least half of their childhood in post-soviet Russia, and the last group was represented by two schoolchildren born in 1996. Their careers unfolded in five stages: personal activity at school or college, devotion to a hobby and active efforts to professionalize it, participation in the FFE protest, switch to local activism, and active professional involvement in local activism rather than quitting local activism<sup>18</sup>.

In the first stage of their careers, the doers just started to be active. They participated in public activities at and outside school or college; they became members of school parliaments, activists at cultural events (samodeyatelnost), and participants in out-of-school children’s organizations. For example, Luba organized a football team for girls (only boys had played football at her school before), Viktor initiated signature collection among schoolchildren for a petition against six-day school week, and Uliana and Gleb made a school newspaper. Uliana was also a school president. “Oh, it’s as usual – school newspapers and all this stuff – I’m the only responsible person” is how Uliana describes her school activities. Gleb even calls the school newspaper he has issued “oppositional”:

“I started to issue an oppositional newspaper in my 11th grade. This was a newspaper called “The Opinion”. The idea was to discuss there the problems we faced in our school, and what people don’t like in the school. I thought that it was not only me who would write the articles, I thought people would reply to me, they would write themselves. It was supposed to be a kind of public activity and I intentionally wrote about urgent and sensitive issues there.” (Gleb, born in 1984, male, “Headquarters”).

Roman says that he always stood against the majority and fought against injustice. In the following passage, Alexandra discusses her school experience:

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<sup>17</sup> In Russian the most precise name for this type of career would be “aktivist- obshchestvennik”. As Risto Alapuro and Markku Lonkila point out, this word “goes back to the Soviet period and denotes persons who actively participate in the social life, engaging themselves into voluntary activity to the good of others” (Alapuro and Lonkila 2014). It should be add to this definition that “aktivisty-obshchestvenniki” are basically those who do voluntary activity in line with a state, so it is an activism without any conflict with state, institutions and other parties. However, this word sounds unfamiliar and is difficult to read and to pronounce for not-Russian speakers. That is why I have decided to use the English word “doers”, which also catches the basic characteristic of this type of career.

<sup>18</sup> The diagram reflecting all four types of careers can be found in the conclusion to this chapter.

“I was a pioneer squad leader [laughing]. Well, I always had some active element. Sure, I participated in squad council; I was a class leader and all that stuff. ... I was organizing something all the time, say, KVN<sup>19</sup>, something like this. Life around me was in full swing.” (Alexandra, born in 1975, female, “Headquarter”).

The only generational specificity that can be found here is the fact that those of the “doers” who spent most of their childhood in the Soviet Union were active as a part of official communist school organizations (the pioneer movement and komsomol). However, the very content of their activity did not really differ from those of “doers” who studied in post-soviet schools – in both cases, it could be issuing of schools’ newspapers, different types of self-organization and self-government, leading of some leisure activity and so forth. It could be explained partly by the fact that post-soviet secondary and high school have been changing very slowly (comparing with the society in general) and even now, they are very similar to soviet schools.

In the second stage, most doers acquired a kind of hobby, the work they really wanted to do and for which they were willing to sacrifice time they could spend with families, friends, and formal jobs (two schoolchildren, unsurprisingly, are the exceptions here). Even the oldest among the “doers”, those who joined a job market in the late Soviet time, started to develop their hobbies after the collapse of the USSR. For some, this hobby coincided with their occupations. In general, the “doers” had unstable occupational careers with low wages because they sacrificed their jobs to give time to their hobbies, or they refused well-paying jobs to be free to do what they considered to be really important. In other words, they behaved as activists within their professional sphere.

For example, Pavel graduated as an engineer and became interested in science in general at university. Nevertheless, after finishing university in the 1990s, he had to earn money for his family and started a small business. In the late 1990s, he came back to his interest in science and chose psychology as a field of study. He earned one more degree (in psychology), took a number of post-graduate professional education courses, opened his own private therapeutic community (which was later closed), and started to work on his candidate degree. He continued to run his business to earn money because his hobby did not bring him much profit, but he did not really develop his business because he did not like it. In the interview, he said that he dreamed of leaving the business and devoting himself to psychology.

Leda’s occupational pathway is similar. She studied economical mathematics at college and after graduation, she started to work in business sector in the same field as she studied in the university. After ten years, she was a successful economist. Nevertheless, she suddenly dropped everything

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<sup>19</sup> KVN is the abbreviation for the Russian phrase “Klub Veselyh i Nahodchivyh” (“Club of Funny and Inventive People”). Originally, it was a comedy television show in which different teams competed by giving humorous replies to particular questions. Later, the tradition of organizing KVN competitions became popular and spread in schools and universities.

she had achieved working in her field and devoted herself to analytic journalism as this was the area she was interested in. She ran columns in two well-known media but left both of them after changes in editorial politics she did not like. She got a job in two little-known newspapers devoted to the problems of education and medicine correspondingly, and she finally feels like she has found her own place.

Marina's occupational career is another example of how "doers" deal with hobby and profession, but unlike Pavel and Leda, she had a hobby that coincided with her professional training and occupation in general. She graduated as a journalist and started to work as a journalist while in college. To be free to manage her time, she chose freelance jobs. She then opened her own journalism project: a local news website devoted to the city where she lived, which became her main hobby. To develop this project, she worked a part-time, low-wage job.

In the third stage of the "doers'" career, they became involved in or strongly supported the nationwide FFE movement. Most of them came to the first rally, not alone, but with relatives or friends, which points to the fact that their milieu became politicized simultaneously. Several of them were even invited to the rally by close relatives. For example, it was Alexandra's husband who initiated her participation in the movement, and it was Egor's mother who invited him into the first rally. This is how Uliana describes her involvement in the movement:

"Some people who were really authoritative for me, so to say, important people, the people who's opinions I usually consider, suddenly came to the rally, started to write something about Navalny, and I think – I should see what it is. ... That is how I've got into all this." (Uliana, born in 1989, female, "People's Council").

It is noteworthy that despite the fact that at the time of the FFE protest, the "doers" had different ages (they were between 16 and 51, though most of them were between 22 and 36), and their attitudes and emotions towards the movement were very similar. As well as representatives of other careers, the "doers" were very enthusiastic about meeting other people similar to them and wanted to do something more concrete than just protest together. Interestingly, they found out that their social circles were "oppositional" as well. "There are no Putin's supporters in my social circle", as Gleb claims in interview. However, what differed them from their friends participating in the FFE rallies as well was the fact that they wanted to do something more concrete and practical than mere participation in mass rallies.

Thus, in the fourth stage, they participated in observing the presidential elections in the spring of 2012 or in Navalny's mayoral election campaign in the summer and autumn of 2013 in their municipal districts. During these campaigns, the "doers" met a lot of likeminded persons and decided to continue their activity at the local level together. Roman explains his involvement in local activism:

“All my life, I could not remain out of the battle when something bad was happening, but the rise of protest activity influenced me a lot. I became more active after that because [I’ve realized that] I’m not the only one person who doesn’t like the things happening in our country.” (Roman, born in 1974, male, “People’s Council”).

As follow-up interviews showed, in the fifth stage of the doers’ career, some became more involved in local activism, whereas others started to spend less time on group activities. The former turned out to be those who were successful in connecting their hobbies, their occupations, and their group activities—journalists, lawyers, and urbanists (five persons in total, two men and three women among them). The latter were all the other people.

Journalists, lawyers, and urbanists not only merged their hobbies with their occupations but also started to use their professional skills in group activities. Journalists made group newspapers, issued group press releases, and covered group work in the media. Lawyers advised group members about legal matters and worked with all the legal documents during particular group campaigns. Urbanists were involved in all the activities concerning neighborhood redevelopment. It is noteworthy that this pathway was similar for men and for women – thus, gender factors of activist involvement (such as participation in collective action concerning children’s’ issues – playgrounds, good ecological environment in the area, school education – or, on the opposite, withdrawing from activism because of necessity of childcare) seem to be less important here than this professional factor. This is how one member of the “People’s Council” describes the division of labor in his group:

“There is one person who is a professional ecologist, and obviously he supervised all campaigns related to ecology. I’m a sportsman; I deal with the problems of sport and PR. There is a person who is involved in separate collection of waste and he opened the first waste sorting center in our neighborhood. ... There is a lawyer, and all of the people asked him to help with some legal issues. They asked him to correct official letters, to say what officials would address a particular problem, and so forth.” (Max, male, born in 1983, “People’s Council”).

“Doers” preferred to do work directly related to their hobbies and professions, often ignoring other areas. For example, Egor participated only in redevelopment problem-solving within the “Headquarters” activities, and Marina covered the Civic Association’s work in the media and refused to take part in other projects. Leda explained that “as a writing person,” she “mainly” participated in work on the group’s newspaper. Asked about involvement in one of the “Headquarters” campaigns, Egor replied: “Yes, sure, I work with transportation as an urbanist, so it is up my street” (Egor, born in 1966, male, “Headquarters”).

Some of these persons left activism for a while to improve their work or family situation, but they came back when the group needed their professional advice and skills. Thus, Viktor, who was tempted by Kirill to run in municipal elections in the spring of 2012 and was one of the “Headquarters” organizers, moved to another neighborhood and quit activism. Later, he moved back but returned to the group only when he found out how he could help as a journalist:

“We made leaflets before. I participated in it but not very actively because I lived in a different district. And then, they decided to make the first newspaper. Apparently, my instinct kicked in; a newspaper — this was for me, I was sure. ... the newspaper was a crucial moment. ... After the newspaper experience, I started to focus on our neighborhood’s problems again. Finally, I became one of the leaders. Well, it’s immodest to speak in that way about myself, so I became one of the central activists.” (Viktor, born in 1987, male, “Headquarters”).

Maria became pregnant after a year of participation in local activism, and she took a break to care for the baby, but she came back when group needed her professional expertise. It is interesting that both Maria and Leda were unmarried mothers, and in a way, they were not “biographically available” for long-term activism. However, being a lawyer and a journalist, they continued to take an active stance in most of groups’ campaigns.

Using their professional skills in civic activity, the “doers” started to perceive their professions as having an “essentially” activist element. Egor says that “urban science is inseparable from civic activity.” Similarly, Maria states:

“We [lawyers] are the official opposition to the authorities in power. It’s because a lawyer is anybody who protects people from the state, from tyranny, and from the difficult situations that can happen with a person because of the state tyranny.” (Maria, born in 1983, “Civic Association”).

Moreover, they considered activism to be a source of new professional skills. This came up quite clearly in from Egor’s interview:

Interviewer: What kind of arguments for or against running for municipal deputy do you have?

Egor: For – it is the pursuit of a better life in our neighborhood and my own wish to better understand the work of the municipal authorities; it will help me as an urbanist. And against – it is that I have not achieved anything. I cannot say to people, “I’m professional. Vote for me. I did this and that for you. (Egor, born in 1966, male, “Headquarter”).

We can see that Egor both perceived professionalism as a necessary feature of activism and expected to get new professional skills through civic activity.

These two simultaneous tendencies – politicization of profession (when professional skills are used in collective action) and professionalization of hobby and activism (when a hobby coincides with professional occupation, and local collective action is seen as a place for applying these professional skills) – resulted in a situation where local politics became, for these people, a kind of vocation in the Weberian sense. They had both passion and “a sense of proportion,” and they oriented their conduct to both an “ethic of ultimate ends” and an “ethic of responsibility” (Weber, 1958). The current analysis reveals how this process occurred: the passion that was an integral part of their hobbies and characterized their civic participation merged with professionalism; thus, their professional training and skills provided them with the “ability to let realities work upon them with inner concentration and calmness” (Weber, 1958). There was no longer a gap between their main jobs and activism at leisure for them; to be a professional now meant to participate in local politics in the name of ultimate ends, and vice versa. This process was similar to what Clement and Zhelnina (forthcoming) call “pragmatic politics”: “the process of linking and aligning one’s everyday life with the developments in the ‘larger’ society and politics.” In this case, the alignment of daily life experience with the larger society influenced the sustainability of the very practices in which these activists were involved.

However, others among the doers could not manage to connect their hobbies to their professions and their activities in local groups. Once the enthusiasm aroused by the FFE mobilizations faded, they (with only one exception) preferred to spend more time on their hobbies and gradually became less involved in the groups’ work. For example, Pavel, who made money in his own business and had psychotherapy as a hobby, needed time to develop the latter; he was planning to finish his candidate dissertation on psychotherapy and ultimately preferred his hobby to local activism. The preference to hobby-profession also comes up quite clearly in an excerpt from Gleb’s interview:

“I hardly have time for the things I have to do for Rock-n-roll Federation. I need to prepare some documents there, and I’ve received a commission as a member of presidium... The presidium gave me a commission to do some things, and I hardly have time to do that. I’m not able to spend any time on the group now.” (Gleb, born in 1983, male, “Headquarter”).

Platon, who was interested in dance, often organized travels abroad to visit different dance festivals and, thus, was usually absent for a long time from Russia. Possibly, these activists would have liked to continue their activity in the local groups, but they had little time and could not find a use for their skills and interests.

Thus, we could say that if the first category of “doers” were, in a sense, “biographically available” for activism (McAdam 1990) as far as their

professions and hobbies became inseparable from activist practice, the second category of “doers”, were “biographically unavailable”, meaning that they had many things to do that were more important for them than collective action in their neighborhoods. However, the concept of “biographical availability” does not fully explain the phenomenon of “doers”’ long-term activist involvement. “Biographical availability” basically means that different people have “objectively” different social circumstances before their involvement (some of them have children while others do not, some of them have flexible jobs while others do not), and these circumstances may facilitate or complicate their activist involvement. In the case of “doers”, all of them had the same social circumstances before the involvement – a hobby they tried to professionalize and devoted all their time to. However, some of them were able to unite with an activist project and thus became “biographically available”, while others did not. To put it in another way, the “doers” who stayed in local activism for a long time were not those who *were* “biographically available” for it, but those who *were able to make* themselves “biographically available”.

To conclude, in the career of the “doers”, they started to be involved in different kinds of public activities within traditional institutes of socialization (e.g., school and college) in youth and continued to demonstrate this activist passion in their adult socialization, including in the professional sphere. Their participation in the FFE movement both intensified their activist practices and changed their content; these practices became more related to politics. However, only those “doers” who harmonized their personal lives with politics and perceived their activist involvement as a vocation, or *Beruf*, remained in post-protest local activism for a long time.

#### 4.3.2. “Volunteers”

“And this was my entry into such zone of not just charity or social help. I started to look for... just started to ask myself – what do I want? What can I influence? Why am I interested in speaking of those issues that are more than just to donate clothes or money? And I decided that I’m interested in ecology” (Tamara, born in 1978, female, “Headquarters”).

“I work in a charity foundation, and unfortunately, the functions of such organizations in Russia are now the substitution of the state. That’s why the very work in a charity foundation makes a person a bit oppositional. ... Speaking about me personally, I am not prone to fight, but to help” (Tanya, born in 1983, female, “People’s Council”).

The “volunteers” career was partly similar to the “doers”, except whereas the “doers” took an active role within traditional institutes of socialization (e.g., school, college, and profession), the “volunteers” found non-traditional spheres for their activity and became non-contentious civic activists before the FFE movement. The career of “volunteers” included the individual trajectories of five people: one was from the “Civic Association”, and two were from the “Headquarters” and the “People’s Council”. It is worth noting that only one was a man. This gender imbalance can be explained by the fact that the volunteers were mostly involved in charity activities before the FFE movement, which was part of the care work usually associated with women (England 2005). It is also telling that unlike “doers”, the “volunteers” were very close to each other in age: they were born between 1978 and 1983. The “volunteers” career unfolded in five stages: personal activity at school or college, non-contentious public or civic activity, participation in the FFE protest, switch to local activism, and quitting local activism.

The first stage of the “volunteers” career was similar to that of the “doers”: involvement in different kinds of activities during school or college and both took place in post-soviet Russia. For example, Tamara was a class monitor and made a school newspaper, while Svetlana always tried to struggle against injustice and challenged teachers. Tanya was a regular participant in school cultural events and charitable actions. As Max highlights in his interview:

“I was a leader, and people didn’t like me. At school, [I participated] in everything. I was an organizer of KVN, and all other stuff. All of that.” (Max, born in 1983, male, “People’s Council”).

In the second stage of this career, when “volunteers” became older, they became involved in some kind of public or civic activity outside the traditional institutes of socialization. Most “volunteers” first participated in such activities personally or with friends and then professionalized them. In the cases of Tamara, Tanya, and Maxim, they all started to help orphan homes during their youth in the late 1990s, donating money to such homes, visiting them, bringing gifts, and playing with the children. After some time, they found jobs with charity foundations or even opened their own foundations, as Max did. For example, as a child in USSR, Tamara was a member of an out-of-school children’s organization (city’s pioneer *otryad*) and participated in charity events with it. While studying in college, she continued to personally help orphan homes. Finally, she found a job with a nongovernment organization (NGO) helping people with HIV and AIDS and was able to combine this with her main occupation as a journalist. Tanya started to help orphan homes in her early adulthood and she was amazed by the charity work her boss did so she decided to do the same on her own. Later, after her father’s death, she reinterpreted her life choices, left the broker’s company she worked in and started to work in a charity foundation with much less salary. Max’s story is a bit different. After some time of

personal efforts to help orphan homes, he met the people who were ready to donate large amounts of money and registered his own charitable foundation in order to receive and use this money legally.

The case of Mila's civic involvement was also connected to professionalization but developed in the opposite direction. In her youth, that is, in the late 1990s, she worked as a reporter at the local TV station and at local newspapers. At that time, she became interested in covering problems of the neighborhood and, consequently, she met local activists. These activists were constantly referring to the "old type of professional journalism" as an ideal type of doing journalism that was lacking now. This ideal type of journalist work presupposed that journalists should always touch pressing, topical and sensitive issues in their coverage. Influenced by conversations with these activists, Mila's perception of what it means to be a good journalist was developed: to be a professional started to mean for her that she contributes to the public debates about local problems. As a journalist, she communicated with activists more and more and helped them with their public representation in the media. Later, she took part in different civic projects to be a better journalist – thus, for example, she visited classes of the Moscow School of Political Research, where she read, spoke and wrote extensively about Russian civil society.

In the third stage of the "volunteers" career, in the ages between 28 and 33, they participated in the FFE movement or supported it without actual participation (by watching livestreams, for example). As they had been previously involved in civic politics, they more or less followed the opposition news in Russia and considered themselves to be opponents of the authorities currently in power, even before the FFE movement. Partly because of this, politicization of "volunteers" social circles was not so important as in the case of "doers". Participating in the FFE rallies, some "volunteers" found their friends' support, while others did not. However, during the FFE movement, as well as representatives of other careers, they were enthusiastic about meeting many likeminded people, but after some time, they felt that rallies for the sake of rallies were pointless. Consequently, they switched to the next stage of their careers: participation in election observation or the Navalny's campaign, and then local activism.

The volunteers showed a specific relation to the problems they protested, considering themselves to be personally responsible for them, as well-described by Tamara:

"When all this protest activity began, I asked a question to myself. I think it's not okay when people just say, "Oh, all these elections. Why does nobody control them?" And I asked myself, "Why don't I address this question to myself?" ... And that is how I decided to be an election observer for the first time in my life. ... And this was my entry into this zone of not just charity or social help. I started to look for ... just started to ask myself, "What do I want? ... And I decided that I'm interested in ecology." (Tamara, born in 1978, female, "Headquarter").

As we can see in this quotation, after the event of the FFE movement, Tamara switched her activity from “just charity or social help” to the solving of more systemic problems. The problems Tamara chose to deal with were not ones she faced in her daily life – quite the opposite, she first decided that she needed to solve some problems and only then chose the problem itself. Working on ecological issues in her neighborhood, Tamara met other members of the “Headquarters”.

To give another example, Max also felt personal responsibility for the future of protest. He was inspired by the FFE rallies, but at the same time, he insisted that those who criticize the authorities should propose a positive alternative. That is how he decided to run for a seat in the municipal council, met other active citizens and organized a local activist group with them later:

“I’m a kind of person that, you know, finds that if you work in a collective, if your work in PR, there is a rule – if you criticize, you need to propose something. It is the same is here. If I want to criticize, I need to propose something. And I’ve gone online and I’ve found information – “the first level of power”, the lowest, these are municipal deputies. I’ve never heard about this institute before this rally and I could not even imagine that it exists. I’ve found out that there will be municipal elections in 2012, and they will be held together with the presidential election. In order to participate in them, I need to apply soon... and so forth.” (Max, male, born in 1983, “People’s Council”).

At first, the volunteers participated actively in their groups’ work, but after one or two years – in the fifth stage of their career – they (with only one exception) became more involved in other civic activities and devoted less time to local activism. Most took part in only local campaigns that coincided with their own interests. For example, Tamara came to the Civic Association to find people who could help her with her ecological struggle in the neighborhood. As soon as the other local activists started to spend their time on other campaigns, she began to work alone. Tanya, as a member of a charity foundation, chose those issues within the local group activities that were connected to helping people. She communicated frequently with women who experienced rape and the elderly who did not have enough money for food. Tanya tried to provide them with psychological help, although other local activists considered these issues to be irrelevant to the group’s activity. At the same time, she rarely participated in the group’s other campaigns. If there were no people who needed such help, Tanya devoted herself to charity work.

Mila’s case is especially interesting here. She became involved in activism through her profession: being a reporter at local TV and working in different local newspapers, she became interested in covering local problems of the neighborhood. She even helped some activists to be covered by media in the way they wanted. At that time, to be a professional journalist meant for her not to avoid acute and pressing issues in the

coverage. When Mila met the activists from “Civic Association,” she participated in the group’s activity a lot, mostly specializing in the group’s press releases and media coverage of the group’s activity. However, some time after Mila realized that politicized professional journalism is more important for her than the local group itself, and that is why she started to help other activist groups to cover their activities in media. She also created a new activist group struggling for the fair, independent, professional journalism in Russia. She was still a friend of most of the activists from the “Civic Association”, but the local group was no longer not the main sphere of her activity.

One more example can be given based on Svetlana’s experience. After a year of active participation in “Headquarters” work, Svetlana became involved in a number of other civic initiatives. For example, she provided assistance to the local groups in other neighborhoods, and helped with the electoral campaigns of other oppositional candidates. Since then, she only took part in “Headquarters” activities when some of the other members directly asked her to help.

In other words, the “volunteers” were involved intensively in civic activism after the FFE movement, but local groups in their neighborhoods were not their priority. The only exception here was Max’s trajectory. As Max won municipal elections and became a deputy, he was also involved in a number of different civic activities. They were all related to his neighborhood and thus part of his local group’s work.

In summary, the “volunteers” career was is similar to that of the “doers”. However, the “volunteers” differed from the “doers” as well, as they not only took on active roles in their school, colleges, and professions but also became involved in professional civic activities (mostly charity) before the FFE movement – a rather rare experience in Russian society. Participating in the FFE rallies, they felt personal responsibility for the problems they discussed and tried to contribute to the solutions. That was how they became involved in the “real deeds” activity in their neighborhoods through election observation or Navalny’s campaigns. After some time (with only one exception), they participated even more intensively in NGO and charity activism, but collective action at the level of their neighborhoods was no longer their priority.

#### **4.3.3. “Oppositional thinkers”**

“I’ve only discussed some problems before. My discontent was rising, but there has not been such a push before... I usually participated in elections, and I was interested in politics, but no more... This was my first experience of actual participation – the FFE movement and after.” (Denis, male, born in 1987, “Headquarter”)

This career consisted of ten individual trajectories: two each from the “Civic Association”, and the “People’s Council” and three each from the “Headquarters”, and the “Public Council”. There were eight men and three women. This gender difference could be coincidental or could reflect the tendency of male domination in politics. As well as “volunteers”, “oppositional thinkers” were close to each other in age, but at the same time, they were younger than the “volunteers” in general (they were born between 1980 and 1990, with the exception of Mark, who was born in 1964). The career of the “oppositional thinkers” unfolded in four stages: development of interest in politics, participation in the FFE protest, a switch to local activism, and leading participation in local groups.

In the first stage of this career, the interviewees’ interest in politics and opposition started to develop. Most representatives of this career became politically aware during their youth, that is, during first two terms of Putin’s presidency, and the others began to follow political news and criticize the authorities only a few years before the FFE movement. Those with an interest in politics from an early age were influenced by their parents in one or another way. Accordingly, the parents of Denis considered themselves to be liberals (meaning that they stood for different types of freedom, including the free market), and he discussed politics with his families since he was in senior high school in the early 2000s. Alexander’s negative attitudes towards Putin and the current regime, in general, also emerged in his high school years in 2003-2005 – at the time when his family started to be interested in politics. Despite the fact that Mark was twice as old as all the other “oppositional thinkers” and thus socialized in a completely different political context in USSR, he developed his early interest in politics, influenced by significant adults. His father was a dedicated communist, and Mark was very enthusiastic about politics when he was a schoolchild.

The “oppositional thinkers” who were politicized early had the experience of political activity in their youth. For example, Kim liked nationalistic ideas and took part in several nationalist protest actions when he was an adolescent. However, it was an infrequent activity and did not last for long, although his critical attitudes toward the authorities persisted. Mark was a leading person in the political information classes in college in the early 1980s. Every high school pupil and college student in the Soviet period was required to participate in political information classes. One of the participants or a leading person was supposed to prepare a report about global political events, and others were supposed to discuss it. In practice, most of students participated in the political information classes just for show – especially, in the late Soviet period (Yurchak 2005). However, Mark really devoted himself to these classes and he always tried to find interesting political news and to involve his classmates in discussion. This is how passionately he recalls this experience in the interview:

“In college, I even was a president of a student union, and I was a komsomol activist, I led political information classes. I was preparing them with all my hearts and I was reading something,

and then I trying to get a message to my friends with all my heart.” (Mark, born in 1964, male, “Public Council”).

Frankly speaking, his efforts were unsuccessful. His attempts to force friends to discuss politics bothered them, Mark was afraid to lose his friends and stopped leading the political information classes<sup>20</sup>. Nevertheless, he preserved his interest in politics and continued to follow the political events of the late 1980s and the early 1990s, being a sympathizer of democratic political forces. This was a general tendency for half of representatives of “oppositional thinkers”: their youthful political activity did not last for long, and they just preserved their critical political attitudes for their future life.

Other “oppositional thinkers” got interested in politics only a few years before the FFE movement, at the age of twenty to twenty-eight, Anton started to read Navalny’s political blog in 2010 and participated in a rally organized by an opposition parties in 2011. Dina started to follow political news after she was invited by a friend to spend the 2010 New Year’s Eve at the office of an opposition party, and she took part in an opposition rally on the eve of the FFE movement. Yana used to listen to liberal radio a few years before the FFE protest; in 2011 she felt like she needed to participate in politics. She joined the “PARNAS” oppositional party, but soon she became disappointed in the party’s activities and started to participate in the “Strategy-31”<sup>21</sup> oppositional rallies. All of these events took place a few months before the big nationwide FFE protest. Galina was extremely passionate about the animals from her childhood; in Summer 2011, she found out that the Moscow administration was going to hunt street dogs and she took part in the rally against it. A few months before the FFE movement, she became a vegetarian and animal rights activist.

As a whole, “the oppositional thinkers” had critical attitudes toward the authorities in power at the time the FFE movement started, but unlike the representatives of other career types, they had not been involved in any kind of systemic *action* (whether non-contentious, as the “doers” and “volunteers” did, or contentious, as the “oppositionists” preferred). In the second stage of the “oppositional thinkers” career, the age of twenty-one to thirty (with exception of Mark who was forty-seven at the time), they took part in the FFE rallies. As well as the “doers”, they did not go to the rallies alone, but took relatives or close friends with them, but usually, they were

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<sup>20</sup> The uncommonness of Mark’s behavior is especially obvious if we look at how Alexei Yurchak, Russian-American sociologists, describes the common practices of komsomol meetings at late Soviet time. “Most young people also regularly attended Komsomol (Communist Union of Youth) meetings at schools, colleges, factories, and other locations. At such meetings, it was not uncommon for people to participate in certain procedures without paying close attention to their literal meanings, such as voting in favor of resolutions without knowing what they said. This was not always the case, but it was certainly a dominant paradigm. Among small groups, the required Komsomol meetings were often reported without actually being held. Anna (born in 1961) remembers regular Komsomol meetings in her student group (twenty to twenty-five people) in college in the early 1980s, where “the komsorg (the meeting’s convener) would often suggest: ‘Maybe we should just write down that we had a discussion and voted in favor of the resolution, without actually having the discussion? I understand that everyone has things to attend to at home.’” (Yurchak 2005: 15-16).

<sup>21</sup> “Strategy-31” is a series of rallies in support of the right to peaceful assembly in Russia guaranteed by Article 31 of the Russian Constitution. The rallies take place on the 31st of every month with 31 days since 2009.

the ones who initiated this decision. During the FFE movement, the “oppositional thinkers”, like the representatives of other careers, discovered the existence of other likeminded people. However, they differed as they not only participated in rallies but also tried to make a difference by their participation. For example, Alexander took part in an online contest competing with prospective rally speakers. He won the contest and delivered a powerful rally speech. Andrey sent messages with the invitation to join the protest to all the people from his phone contact list before every rally. Mark and Yana made leaflets appealing for protesters to participate in municipal elections and distributed them during the rally. The “oppositional thinkers” felt like they had waited for a long time, and it was finally the time for action. This attitude emerged quite clearly in the following excerpt from Mark’s interview:

“I was aware of politics during my whole life, but I was not politically active, especially for the last twenty years. I worked, raised money for the family, for the house, for the car, for something else. ... I was working for all of this recently. ... but I always wanted to – I was thinking, that it is the time. That’s it. I need to attend a rally. ... but I didn’t do it. I only watched. I was a kind of fighter-contemplator. And now I’ve realized that it’s time to be active” (Mark, born in 1964, male, “Public Council”).

Like all other local activists, the “oppositional thinkers” participated in election observation or the Navalny’s campaign in their neighborhoods and met other active people there. That was how they switched to local activism in the third stage of their careers. The peculiarity of this career path was that the “oppositional thinkers” were among the initiators of new local activist groups. They proposed organizing groups to preserve people’s enthusiasm and prolong their protest involvement. Thus, the idea to create the “Civic Association” was first expressed by Alexander. As well, Anton met several independent candidates running for municipal deputy in his neighborhood and organized an online group in social networks to provide support for them. On the basis of this same group, the “Headquarters” emerged.

It was also important that the “oppositional thinkers” viewed local activism, first and foremost as a means of accomplishing political goals, to wake people up and fight their apathy (Denis), to score political points and use them in the next elections (Alexander), and so forth. As Mark states:

“We will earn a reputation now. Let people trust us, and at a certain point, we will start to use this trust for our political goals. For example, we will say during the municipal elections that we are the people who helped you last year.” (Mark, born in 1964, male, “Public Council”).

It is worth noting that another representative of an “oppositional thinkers” career, Nikita, opposed Mark’s point of view. He insisted that these were

“real deed” activities that should be the main goal of their group. Nikita and Mark were even quarreling with each other concerning this issue. However, even Nikita speaks about “real deeds” in his interview as a means for accomplishing political goals, but unlike Mark, he just thinks that it is not the right time for the group to make its political goals public.

“One of our group’s participants, a member of the oppositional party, has decided to run in the municipal elections. I told him: okay, Sam, if someone from “Public Council” decides to help you – welcome, but we will not help you as a group. We are not a political organization. ... I was against that because I thought if we would do it, if we would collaborate with this oppositional party as a group, we would pay for it and it may have a bad impact on our activity, just because this party has very bad polls. ... If people think that we are supporters of this party, we will just lose many of our supporters. ... I just understood that this guy couldn’t win. This party just cannot win now in Russia.” (Nikita, male, born in 1980, “Public Council”).

In the fourth career stage, the oppositional thinkers became more involved in local activism. They participated in most of their groups’ activities and, moreover, often initiated such activities. Some also took part in broader social campaigns. For example, Mark and Yana helped local initiatives in other neighborhoods, while Kim and Andrey participated in social movements against drug consumption and the legalization of weapons. Yana even left her job to have more time for activism. Half of the representatives of the oppositional thinkers became leaders of their local groups. Only Dina’s trajectory differed; she was very active during the first months of the group’s work but then quit local activism.

Thus, the career of the “oppositional thinkers” unfolded in four stages. In the first stage, they became interested in politics and gained critical attitudes toward the authorities in power. Next, they participated in the FFE movement and felt personal responsibility for the future of the protests. Consequently, they switched to local activism and finally took on the most active positions in their local activist groups.

#### 4.3.4. “Oppositionists”

My family has democratic beliefs. It influences me somehow, but my parents did not impose anything on me . ... Dad was totally anti-soviet (*antisovetchik*) in his attitudes because we have repressed relatives in our family. And my mom - all that glasnost, freedom, etc – my mom supported all this when the Perestroika began. And they always voted for SPS<sup>22</sup> or

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<sup>22</sup> SPS is the Russian abbreviation of Soyuz Pravyh Sil (The Union of Right Forces), right-liberal political party, existed in Russia between 1999 and 2008.

“Yabloko”<sup>23</sup>. And since the very beginning of 2000s when Putin became President, all our family did not like him, and me too.” (Kirill, born in 1986, male, “Headquarters”).

The fourth type of career was the “oppositionists” career. There were only four individual trajectories that could be classified as such (two each from the “Civic Association” and “Headquarters”), and thus, the two other groups did not have “oppositionists” representatives at all. Nevertheless, these four trajectories revealed a specific career path. All four of these “oppositionists” were men, and again, it is also difficult to say whether this gender gap was coincidental or a reflection of the tendency toward male domination in politics. Three of them were born between 1981 and 1986, and the fourth was born in 1968. The career unfolded in five stages: development of an interest in politics, anti-regime struggles, participation in the FFE protest, switch to local activism, and exit from local activism.

This career was somewhat similar to the “oppositional thinkers” one, with two crucial differences. The “oppositionists” had experience with a long-term political struggle before the FFE movement, and most left local activism after some time of participation in it.

At the first stage of their careers, the “oppositionists” developed an interest in politics, as did the “oppositional thinkers”. All of the oppositionists came from politicized families or had politicized relatives who participated in their education. Gregory’s grandfather had been politically active since the 1990s (at that time Gregory was six to seven years old). He participated in rallies in support of Eltsin in 1991, and in communist-party rallies few years later, and usually initiated political discussions at home. Dmitry’s father used to listen to liberal-oriented radio (“Echo of Moscow”) since 1990s, and criticized all politicians throughout Dmitry’s childhood as well. This is how Kirill describes his family in the interview:

“My family has democratic beliefs. It influenced me somehow, but parents did not impose anything on me. ... Dad was anti-soviet (*antisovetchik*) because we have repressed relatives in our family. And my mom, all that glasnost, freedom, etc – my mom supported all this when the Perestroika began and they always voted for SPS or “Yabloko.” (Kirill, born in 1986, male, “Headquarters”).

Makar spoke about the politicization of his family and political discussions during childhood as if they were common-sense issues (which sound especially unusual taking into account the fact that he grew up in the Soviet time).

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<sup>23</sup> Yabloko” is liberal (left-liberal) political party which was organized in Russia in 2001 and exists until now.

“Interviewer: Did you discuss politics with your parents in childhood?”

Makar: Sure, without discussing politics, you can hardly become an activist.” (Makar, male, born in 1968, “Civic Association”).

While most activists did not have politicized families, it was especially telling that the “oppositionists” considered having a politicized family to be an obvious condition for becoming an activist.

The “oppositionists” also recalled the stories in interviews about how exactly they faced politics during their childhood. Thus, Kirill explains in the interview that he played in a referendum when he was a kid, and Dmitry says that he loved to watch the “Kukly<sup>24</sup>” TV show because “when the authority is criticized, it is pleasant to listen.”

It was also interesting that unlike the “doers”, the “oppositionists” not only refused to participate in a public activity at school but did so on principle. Makar, who went to high school in the early 1980s, told that he hated so-called school activists who, from his point of view, were completely subject to the school administrators. Dmitry, who studied in high school at the beginning of 1990s, described public activity at schools as common among Soviet pupils (e.g., pioneering and collective street cleaning or *subbotniki*) as obligatory (*obyzalovka*), and as not voluntary. That is how he states it in the interview:

“I didn’t like public activity at school because it was like “to order – to perform”. For example, there was an order to clean leaves on the street. I refused to do it. I didn’t reply roughly, I just refused. ... I refused to be a pioneer and it was obligatory to be a pioneer, I just refused, I was snubbed for it. I don’t know how it happened, but I’ve never worn a school uniform. I was the only one in my class who did not wear it. I don’t know why. Probably, it was not me but my father who said to me that if you don’t want to, you don’t have to wear it, or he just directly said to me not to wear it, I don’t remember now.” (Dmitry, born in 1981, male, “Civic Association”).

A similar attitude comes up in the interview with Kirill when he speaks about his University experience, taking place in the early 2000s.

“Interviewer: Did you participate in some public activity at school or University?”

Kirill: No. I [don’t like] all these official things (*oficioz*). We have such things at our Department Student Union, all this stuff – I’ve never participated in it because all this is window-dressing. There

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<sup>24</sup> “Kukly” (“Puppets”) is Russian satirical political TV show that existed between 1994 and 2002. Each puppet in the show represented one of the leading politicians and they discussed sensitive issues in a critical and satirical way.

was no real student autonomy.” (Kirill, male, born in 1986, “Headquarters”).

In the second career stage, starting from 2007, the “oppositionists” became involved in political struggles against the authorities in power, such as anti-regime protests actions (for example, “The Dissenters' March<sup>25</sup>”) and long-term campaigns on concrete issues (e.g., the demolition of garages and the defense of car drivers’ rights). Three of them were between twenty and thirty years old at that time, and only Makar was around forty. Over time, they started to participate more and more in political actions. Two even became initiators and leaders of political organizations. Thus, the “oppositionists” were already political activists when the FFE mobilization emerged. Nevertheless, it was an important event for them because it showed a rise in the popularity of political protests. That was why in the third stage of the oppositionists’ careers, they joined the nationwide mobilization with great enthusiasm.

During the FFE protest, they tried to promote its rise and to prevent mobilized people from withdrawing (here, again, we can see the similarity to the “oppositional thinkers” career). The “oppositionists” were both more active in and more critical of the FFE movement than the representatives of other careers and rank-and-file protest participants pointed out the weaknesses of the movement’s political agenda, organization, and recruitment work.

For example, Dmitry made acquaintances with people in the train going from his small town to St. Petersburg when he went to a protest rally. He supposed that some of the train passengers were going to the FFE rally like him, that they lived in the same small town, and that is why, from his point of view, they needed to know each other and to do something together. Kirill was among the organizers of the first FFE rally, but at the same time, in the interview, he states that the rallies themselves were not enough for the effective political work, and the building of stable political institutions was more an important and difficult undertaking. Makar criticizes the FFE protest for the lack of organizational efforts as well.

“There are a lot of pluses in the rallies, and they mobilize people and unite them. ... That’s why we need to continue rallies. But our main work is on other things. The main work of any organization is its expansion and development. ... The people who organize the FFE rallies do it spontaneously. They do not create organizations. ... You see, people just came, were united – and this is all! The thing is in organizations. There are no organizations, they did not exist.” (Makar, born in 1968, male, “Civic Association”).

Like many other members of local groups, in the fourth career stage, the “oppositionists” became involved in local activism through participation in municipal elections in their districts (as observers, coordinators, and even

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<sup>25</sup> “The dissenters' march” is the street anti-regime action of the Russian opposition, which existed between 2005 and 2008.

candidates). Being the critics of the system from the early childhood, after the FFE movement the “oppositionists” tried to become a part of official (even if just low-level) political institutions. This visible contradiction can be easily resolved. It was the FFE movement that changed the cultural meanings people attributed to some activities. Thus, if before the FFE protest, participating in municipal elections was just one of the ways to build a bureaucratic career within party of power, most citizens even did not know that they had local deputies in their districts, after the FFE protest municipal elections started to be the field for political struggles with the party of power.

The “oppositionists” were among the initiators of the local activist groups, but unlike the “doers” and the “volunteers” and similar to the “oppositional thinkers”, the “oppositionists” conceived of local activism as a means for building new political institutions. During their involvement in local activism, the “oppositionists” continued to work on anti-regime projects and actions. They attended anti-regime rallies not directly connected to local activism and participated in the elections in the Coordination Council of Opposition<sup>26</sup>, and in the work of political parties. Moreover, they perceived local civic activism as part of their anti-regime political struggle. As Gregory states, “it’s more fun to participate in municipal elections than just to agitate against Putin.” Similarly, when Kirill reconstructs his decision to be involved in local activism, he says:

“I think that a politician should have some reputation. How did people assert the claims of Yashin<sup>27</sup>? It’s like “Who is this Yashin, what is he like? And this is valid. You should have some biography, some political capital. And I decided that I need to go through all the stages, to start with the municipal level. It gives me some competences, some skills, the understanding of how the system of city government works. ... I decided that my forte is urban problems. There are no chances to be the second Nemcov<sup>28</sup> and the second Yashin. ... The goal of my participation [in local activism] as a political activist is not limited to concrete victories. The goal is to mobilize the people in the political protest.” (Kirill, male, born in 1986, “Headquarters”).

We can see that civic activism is perceived by Kirill as a part of his political career.

After some time, during the fifth career stage, the “oppositionists” started to disengage from local activism and refocused on anti-regime political initiatives with a more abstract, general agenda (party politics, union politics, educational initiatives). For example, in the follow-up

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<sup>26</sup> Coordination Council of Opposition is the coordination body aimed to represent all Russian opposition. The elections in CCO took place in autumn, 2012. In practice, CCO ceased to exist soon after those elections.

<sup>27</sup> Ilya Yashin is a well-known Russian oppositional politician.

<sup>28</sup> Boris Nemcov was a well-known Russian statesman and then became an oppositional politician. He was killed in February 2015. He was still alive at the moment of the interview.

interview Dmitry explains that he almost left “Civic Association” because of internal conflicts, and now he is involved in the organization of educational projects for children devoted to the promotion of the Western culture of public communication and civic participation. Gregory says that he does not have time for local activism because he is one of the leaders of the oppositional protest campaign on education. The case of Kirill, the leader of the “Headquarters” group, was an exception; participation in local activism became his major life project. However, he perceived his local engagement as part of his *political* career as an opposition politician, as a means to increase his political capital. That was why he not only continued to participate in local activism but also became a municipal deputy. He was the only one of “oppositionists” who was able to combine his commitment to anti-regime politics and local civic activism.

To conclude, the “oppositionists” career was somewhat similar to that of the “oppositional thinkers”. Both acquired an interest in politics at an early age, but the “oppositionists” started to participate in long-term political struggles with the authorities in power before the FFE movement; therefore, it is important to separate them as specific careers. At the time, when the FFE movement emerged, the “oppositionists” were already political activists and saw local activism as a way to use the protest potential of ordinary people in the long-term anti-regime struggle. However, three of the four oppositionists virtually left local activism in several years, while only one succeeded in reconciling local civic activism and political contention.

#### **4.4. Three Exceptional Trajectories**

There are three individual trajectories among thirty six analyzed that cannot be included into any career types described above. However, they are significant as exceptions. In that way, they represent possible but not usual pathways of involvement to the new local activism. The first was involvement as a result of facing personally important problems and politicization during the solving of this problem (this way is widely described in the works of Della Porta 1993, Klement 2010, Gladarev 2011, Tykanova and Khohlova 2014 and some other scholars, mentioned in the literature review chapter). The second (two individual trajectories fit it) was the involvement in long-term activism only because of participation in the FFE movement without any previous experience of public or political activity. In this section, all three exceptional trajectories are described.

Petr was born in St. Petersburg in 1977. He grew up in the family without a father who died when he was a little child. In his childhood, his mother often went outdoors with him and his brother, and they usually spent their weekend in public parks in a small city near St. Petersburg. This was the city where the “Civic Association” would be organized many years later. Since that time, Petr wished to live in this city, right near the forest. He entered the Polytechnic University where he took part in many student activities. Thus, for example, he was a member of the University Student

Council. After graduation, Petr worked as an engineer and started his occupational career in the defense enterprise and then moved to a private company. He married in the early 2000s and his three children were born a few years later. In 2007, Petr finally started to achieve his child's dream to live near the forest. He bought land in this same city (where the "Civic Association" was created five years later) and began to build a house. In the process of construction, he realized that there were plenty of communal and urban problems in this area. There was no actual road to his territory, and there was still no gas and electricity there, and so forth. He tried to solve these problems, asking for help from the local administration and even appealed to Putin directly. When the FFE movement started, he was not interested in protest at all, and moreover, he was a supporter of Putin. Nevertheless, Petr became more and more critical towards local authorities and the ruling party in general because the officials did not only did not help him, but they even made the situation worse. He realized that the system was corrupt in general, and that the officials were not interested in making ordinary people's lives better at all. He met the activists from "Civic Association" in 2013 when he organized local dwellers living near him to struggle with the municipal administration to solve their problems. They collaborated a lot, and after some time Petr considered himself as a member of the group. Later he even became one of the group's leaders. In Autumn of 2015, he participated in almost all of the campaigns of the "Civic Association" and defined himself as an oppositionist to the current authority in power.

Another case is that of Diana who was born in 1990 in a small provincial town far away from Moscow. She was interested in biology from high school and later she enrolled at the veterinary academy, department of biology. She studied bioecology, biophysics, and biochemistry and was fascinated by science in general. After graduation, Diana continued to work at the university's laboratory. She was not actually publicly active at school or university and had no civic or political experience before the FFE movement. In the very beginning of the FFE protest, she also had no interest in it. However, in the summer of 2013, her friend asked her just to do him a favor and to vote for Navalny in the Moscow mayoral election. That was how Diana started to read about Navalny; she liked his ideas and decided to help him in his electoral campaign. Participating in this campaign in her neighborhood, she met other active people; a few months later they organized the "People's Council" together. Simultaneously, Diana started to take part in many oppositional initiatives and did not miss any oppositional rally.

Ivan's story is similar in the sense that he also had no experience in public activity of any kind before the FFE movement. He was born in 1989 in a small city far away from St. Petersburg, but his family moved to St. Petersburg when he was four. He entered a specialized high school in the humanities, and then, the marine academy. He graduated as a logistics specialist and worked in his field in a private company. A few months before the FFE movement, he found Navalny's blog and started to read it. Since December 2011, he has participated in most of the FFE rallies. He describes

his life as divided into the periods “before” and “after” the FFE movement. In 2013, he was inspired by the idea “to do something concrete” promoted during the FFE rallies and searched the Internet for people who live in his area and have similar intentions. That is how he found the “Civic Association” and joined the group. Later he became one of the most active persons in the group.

These three trajectories represent two ways of involvement in activism, which are theoretically possible and even widespread in some other contexts, but not usual for the new local activism that emerged out of the FFE movement. For example, many researchers show that involvement as a result of facing immediate problems or personal concern is the most common for the local activists before the FFE movement (Klement 2010, Gladarev 2011, Tykanova and Khohlova 2014, Miryasova 2014). However, among thirty-six new local activists, only Petr has this kind of trajectory. In this sense, it is especially evident now that the local activism studied in this dissertation is different from those types of local activism that existed in Russia before the FFE movement. Post-protest local activism emerged as a result of a big political event, and a set of very specific biographical trajectories has led to it. It can also be seen that the politicization during the FFE movement without any previous experience of activity rarely led to an involvement in the new local activism: only two people have this kind of trajectory. Thus, on the one hand, the new local activism was the activism that emerged out of the big political event, and as its consequence, and pathways leading to it were different from pathways of local involvement described in the literature. On the other hand, it became possible only because there were people participating in the FFE protest who had already had the actual experience of (mostly non-political) participation.

#### **4.5. Conclusion**

The new local activism emerged out of the FFE movement right after presidential electoral campaign in March 2012. Many of the FFE movement protesters became independent electoral observers in their neighborhoods, where they met each other and after the elections, decided to stay together and to finally get real things done. In September 2013, Navalny’s electoral campaign had a similar effect on local activism. Other former FFE movement participants who were helping Navalny in their municipal districts, met each other and local activists, and joined local groups after the elections. Both male and female FFE rallies participants took equal part in local activism. However, if at the FFE movement young well-educated people were overrepresented compared with the population in general, in local activism they were overrepresented compared even with the FFE movement. Thus, the very core of the FFE movement protesters, the people, who were visible in the rallies and in media were often called “middle-class” and these were organized into local activist groups.

However, they had different experience before the FFE movement, accumulated in different ways. Analytically, these ways of experience’s

accumulation have been divided into four types, or four activist careers, represented by “doers”, “volunteers”, “oppositional thinkers” and “oppositionists”. In the “doers” career, people took active roles in traditional institutes of socialization (e.g., school and college, and even professional activities) from an early age, and then became involved in the FFE movement. However, after some time, the enthusiasm they experienced on the nationwide rallies that pushed them to continue their activity at the local level declined, and some of the representatives of “doers” quit local activism in order to save time for their hobbies or families. Only those people who were able to merge their hobbies, their occupation and their civic activity stayed active within local groups. The “volunteers” career is similar with the previous one, but it includes the experience of non-contentious civic activity (mostly, charities) outside the traditional institutes of socialization in the second stage, a rarity in Russian society. The FFE movement led to short-term politicization, followed by withdrawal into moral engagement through volunteering. Those in the “oppositional thinkers” career gained an interest in politics and critical attitudes toward the political regime before the FFE movement. During the FFE protest, they felt that they were waiting for a long time and this was finally the time to become politically active. That is why they did not just visit the rallies as did rank-and-file FFE movement participants, but tried to organize other people to do something else. Most of the “oppositional thinkers” stayed active in local activism for a long time and even became the leaders of their local groups. Finally, the “oppositionists” career involved actual participation in protest politics long before the FFE mobilization. When the FFE movement emerged, they were already professional activists and just looked for an opportunity to save people’s protest enthusiasm and to use it in the future struggle against the current political regime. Nevertheless, after some time, most of them quit local activism and came back to the broader oppositional campaigns. The only exception was the person who won the local elections and became municipal deputy, thus making his political career inseparable from small and “real” local activity.

Two other types of trajectories were found, but they were represented by the life-stories of just three individuals (one individual for the first type of trajectory and two others for the second type). In this case, these trajectories could not be classified as “careers”, because they were not common for the new local activism in Russia, instead being the exceptions. The first was the mobilization provoked by the invasion of the familiar realm, and the second was the mobilization just because of the event of the FFE movement, not reinforced by any previous pre-protest experience. These two types of mobilization/activist careers, being widely described in the literature and being, thus, quite typical for the long-term local activist involvement, were at the same time not common at all for the post-protest local activists. Thus, these exceptional trajectories highlight the specific features of the new local activism in Russia. It was not caused by the personal/private concerns of participants, but neither did it become possible because of the event of the FFE movement itself. Pre-protest socialization disposed certain people to activism in general, which can be seen as a necessary but insufficient

condition for involvement in post-protest local activism. The experience of the FFE movement itself was important because it changed the content and the meaning of activity in which these people were involved and connected non-overlapping experiences and careers—thus making a new “hybrid” type of local activism in Russia possible. In the next chapter, its “hybrid” character and contribution of biographies into its explanation are discussed in detail.

## **CHAPTER V. POLITICAL CULTURE AND BIOGRAPHY: HOW ACTIVIST CAREERS CONTRIBUTED TO THE GROUP STYLE**

In this chapter, not only at individual biographies are considered, but also the collective modes of thinking, speaking and acting within the new local activism that emerged as an outcome of the FFE movement. As was already pointed out in the Chapter I, Russian local activism before the FFE movement has been mostly “avoiding politics”. The mass political protest of 2011-2012 produced a new, “hybrid” type of local collective action. In 2015, four years after the FFE protest, the new local activism reproduced the form of an apolitical urban activity of one-issue campaigns in a familiar “close-to-home” sphere. However, it gave this form political substance and meaning. While the “concrete action leading to visible results” vs. “abstract politics” code continued to be crucial for the activist political culture, the opposition between these two poles has been radically rearticulated in the activists’ discourses and a new group style has been created. This new group style represents the important changes in the activist political culture in Russia.

In chapter III, how the set of structural and cultural factors explain the very fact of post-protest local activism emergence was shown. However, this explanation is not enough to explain the specific, politicized character of local activism and the new group style created within it. In the literature, the specific features of spin-off movements usually explained by the fact that the most successful elements of know-how invented during mass protest are routinized in long-term day-to-day local movements. But this approach does not work in case of Russian post-protest local activism. The “real deeds” ethics that was brought to local activism from the FFE rallies had a crucial importance for the very fact of creation of local groups, but finally it was transformed in a completely new ethics and way of thinking and acting. Thus, the new group style was not a result of routinization of early-riser repertoire, frames and modes of thinking, but was a result of its transformation. In this chapter, an explanation of this process is proposed.

The chapter consists of four sections. In the first section, two opposite approaches to local activism existing among local groups’ members in the very beginning of the emergence of the group is highlighted. The first approach presupposes getting real things done for their own sake, while the second one implies that “real deeds” activity is just a mean for activists to mobilize people to struggle with the authority in power. In the second section, it is shown that these approaches actually correspond with the activist careers identified in the previous chapter. Thus, the “oppositionists” and the “oppositional thinkers” brought “radical” attitude to local activism, defying “real deeds” as a rhetorical instrument to mobilize apolitical dwellers for political struggle for regime change. At the same time, the “volunteers” and partly the “doers”, when they came to the local groups, perceived local activism as the way to do “real deeds” for their own sake. In

the third section, how both approaches were superseded, during the evolution of the activist groups, by a new, third approach that united politics and “real deeds” in a single frame is described. The new group style was thus created, implying that solving local problems and doing politics are two sides of the same activity. How the biographies contributed to the new group style formation is shown: how people with different experiences and know-how (different activist careers) have met in the same time and place and who would not ever have met if it were not for and because of the FFE movement. These different experiences and know-how overlapped, and the new “hybrid” style of thinking and acting have been created. In the fourth section, the empirical findings are summarized and it is argued that the activist biographies taken in interactionist perspective as the channels of accumulating experiences and transferring it from one place to another is thus the necessary part of the explanation of why this specific politicized and “hybrid” type of local activism emerged.

### ***5.1. The Beginning: Two Opposite Approaches to Local Activism***

In the beginning of the groups’ existence, the activists divided themselves into two categories: the moderates (by self-definition) and the radicals (by definition of the moderates). If the radicals claimed that their groups should be directly involved in politics on the local level, the moderates insisted that local groups’ activity should be devoted to effectively solving local problems and should not have strong connections to politics (Žuravlev 2017). This conflict was present, not only in the eyes of groups’ members, but also in the first years of the groups’ existence, and different people could be classified as more or less close to one or another pole of this opposition. In the following, the consequences of both are analyzed.

#### **5.1.1. “Real Deeds for Their Own Sake”**

As the name implies, this approach presupposes that some small but very concrete activities that local activists are involved in – urban municipal improvement, the defense of squares or parks from infill construction (what are usually called “real deeds”) are valuable in themselves and are an end to be pursued. This emerges quite significantly in Vlad’s interview with an expert.

“We’ve just decided that we need to coalesce as citizens and to do something good for the city. Not like – we’ve observed elections and that’s it – we’ve decided to do something else, something really good for the city” (Vlad, born in 1996, male, “Civic Association”).

According to this logic, the more real deeds are done, the better the world will be, and the systemic changes are not necessary. Systemic changes are often associated with a “revolution” that could make things even worse. Thus, in the following excerpt from an interview, Tanya opposes “real deeds” and “revolution”.

“I’m personally definitely against the current authority in power. But just to support any person who is against authority, is the wrong position. My point of view is that any severe upheavals, revolutions, and so forth do not lead to anything good. I think the best changes are those occurring in our minds and these changes occur when you just live and do something concrete, when you try to improve your neighborhood, your city, and your country. I think these are the best changes” (Tanya, female, born in 1983, “People’s Council”).

Gleb’s words are quite similar.

“I have an active stance, but I try to do my activism reasonably. I want to arrive at an outcome, not—“all the world’s—” Damn. I’ve forgotten the lyrics of “The Internationale.” “We will destroy this world [of violence] down to the foundations, and then we will build [our] new world.” I’m more interested in building than destroying so destructive and aggressive activists are not my cup of tea. I realize that when we destroy everything down to the foundations, it will be difficult to build our own world on top of them. I would argue we have to build on the basis of what exists, gradually replacing the bad things.” (Gleb, born 1984, “Headquarters”).

“Real deeds”, in this approach, are also opposed to the “meaningless” protest and political speeches. Just going to the rallies without doing anything concrete and useful is perceived as the wrong way of doing activism. As Pavel complains,

“The people in the FFE movement just protested for the sake of the protest, and they just ranted for the camera. It is necessary to do real deeds, and not only in Moscow.” (Pavel, born in 1969, male, “Civic Association”).

The same approach can be found in the observational fieldnotes taken by my colleagues and me during the walk through the district organized by “Civic Association’s” activists in order to talk with the citizens about the problems they have and to take the pictures of these problems. In the middle of the walk Alexander, the group’s informal leader, started to explain to other activists how to speak with the citizens in a way not to scare them away and to attract their votes on the forthcoming municipal election. Then, according to the fieldnotes taken by Oleg Zhuravlev,

“Ivan interrupted Alexander and said –“hey Fuhrer, stop it! You’ll take the floor later’ – like now it is time to do something useful” (observational fieldnotes, August 21, 2014).

In this approach, “the political is associated with aggression, abstraction, showing off, destruction, propaganda, critique, ideology, and chatter, while “real deeds” are bound up with specificity, meaningfulness, goodness, usefulness, practicality, effectiveness, familiarity, mundaneness, peace, and realism” (Zhuravlev, Erpyleva, Savelyeva 2017).

At the same time, it is important to understand that this logic has a strategic dimension in a sense that while using it, the activists are not personally concerned with parks, benches, or backyards. These are not their own benches or backyards that need to be fixed or defended. Rather, they want to do something concrete and “real”, no matter what exactly it is and how “close” it will be to their homes. As Gleb states,

“And this garbage problem, I’m interested in it as well. ... but it’s not the case that I have a lot of environmental consciousness, I’m just interested in making these things work.” (Gleb, born in 1983, male, “Headquarter”).

We can see that Gleb, personally, is not really concerned with the absence of separate waste collection in his neighborhood. He just wants “to make things work”. Thus, the two main features of this approach are: 1) “real deeds” are not connected to the problems activists face in daily life, and 2) the aggregation of many “real deeds” is perceived as leading to the positive changes in a society.

### **5.1.2. “Real Deeds as a Means of Political Struggle”**

Another approach is based on the opposition between “politics” and “real deeds”, endowed the political with a positive meaning. In this approach, “real deeds” generally function as a tactic that legitimizes collective action, which inevitably has a political dimension and which allows activists to achieve *systemic* political changes in a society. The “real deeds” within this logic are also not connected to the problems activists face in their daily lives. However, the crucial difference with the first approach is that the “real deeds” are understood as not important on their own. It is clearly stated, for example, in Makar’s interview:

“As for the pharmaceutical cluster building, I don’t see a big problem in it. But still ... we need to attract the eye of the public to that. ... We need to use all the means and all the ways to try to make the citizens of our neighborhood self-aware, aware of their lives, and of their place of life.” (Makar, born in 1968, male, “Civic Association”).

As we can see from this quotation, the “real deeds” (the struggle against the construction of the pharmaceutical cluster building) are meaningful only as a way to awake civic consciousness. According to this logic, all the problems local activists try to solve are the political problems.

“All the decisions made, even administrative ones, they are political decisions. They change people’s lives, they concern the majority of the people. ... When they are made and people start to protest, they are told: “don’t bring politics here”. But these decisions are political; they are made by people who are members of one political party. This is all politics.” (Kirill, born in 1986, male, “Headquarters”).

Echoing Alexis de Tocqueville’s words that voluntary associations are the “schools of democracy”, “real deeds” are imagined in this case as a kind of recipe for civically educating the residents of the district.

“Until the off-season, until the next elections, we need to reorient ourselves into a civic association, meaning gradually solving problems and scoring some political points. [...] I would not say we have deliberately decided to move together in this direction and establish a political force, but rather to establish a certain base of concerned people, a framework for developing civil society and pressure groups in P.” (Alexander, born 1989, “Civic Association”).

Using the tactic of “real deeds” “to score political points”, the activists sharing this approach called for converting these points in their support at the municipal elections, as Mark explains in the already cited quotation.

“We earn reputation now, so let people trust us, and at certain point, we will start to use this trust for our political goals. For example, we will tell at the municipal elections that we are the people who helped you in the previous year.” (Mark, born in 1964, male, “Public Council”).

Even more telling examples can be found in the fieldnotes made during the participant observations of the groups’ activity. Thus, one of the activists told in a personal conversation that the goal of their group during municipal elections was to prevent the party of power’s deputies from occupying seats in the local parliament. But when she convinced people to vote for their group in public, she invoked the following arguments. “If you vote for X., from United Russia, she claimed, you would in fact not be voting for his political party, but for the construction company owned by the councilor, which had already demolished several residential buildings in the district.” In other words, she used the “real” everyday problems in order to agitate against the representatives of the party in power.

Another telling example can be found in the fieldnotes made by Oleg Zhuravlev when the observation was carried out during the “Civic Association’s” electoral campaign. The activists walked through the neighborhood speaking with the citizens about the problems they have and taking the pictures of these problems.

“Alexander, the group’s informal leader, yells at Mila, “you talk to the residents, but only give them the right message.” I ask Alexander what the right message is. He stops, interrupting his discussion with Ivan about what to photograph and how to photograph it. He explains to me that “one shouldn’t buttonhole them right away”, although they “definitely have to invite people to the meeting” He says there is no need to promise people anything, since promises are “old-fashioned.” They have to get specific things done and show results. They do not need to make promises, but to talk about what they have already done. “People don’t believe in windbags and blowhards. You have to show them you have got the bench put yourself there and seat the old woman in it yourself.” (observational fieldnotes, August 21, 2014).

In other words, the “real deeds” practice is used here as a political strategy to attract people’s sympathies on the eve of the municipal election.

In this approach, “real deeds” are associated with what gets people’s attention, raises recognition, strengthens reputations, trains people to fight for their rights, and overcomes apathy. Local activism is juxtaposed with “pure” politics, which in this case is not regarded as excessively aggressive, ideologized, and propagandistic, but is imagined as insufficiently effective and too far from the people.

Ultimately, it does not really matter, according to this logic, whether the activists will finally get good benches or good parks in their neighborhoods or not. What is important is that the people who struggle for the good benches now will vote for the oppositional candidates or even participate in anti-regime politics later. Thus, this approach implies that: 1) “real deeds” are not connected to the problems activists face in daily life personally, and 2) to do “real deeds” is a way to awake people’s civic consciousness and to involve them into the political struggle with the authority in power.

## ***5.2. Two Approaches to Local Activism and Activist Careers***

The different careers identified through the analysis above are related to these two approaches to local activism. Analysis of the interviews conducted in the first two years of the groups’ existence (the interviews with members of the “Civic Association” and the “Headquarters”) shows that the representatives of different career types brought different attitudes to local activism from the FFE movement. Not surprisingly, the “oppositionists” and the “oppositional thinkers” were those defined as “radicals” at the beginning

of their involvement in local activism. Most “doers” were moderates in the sense that they did not want to speak about politics in public, but at the same, they used the logic of both real deeds for the sake of themselves and real deeds as a mean for political struggle. Finally, at the beginning of their involvement, all the “volunteers” perceived local activism as a way to do real deeds for their own sake. In the next three sections, the connection between approaches to local activism and activist careers are considered in more detail.

### **5.2.1. “Oppositionists” and “Oppositional thinkers”: Real Deeds as a Means of Political Struggle**

As has already been pointed out, the “oppositionists” and the “oppositional thinkers” were exactly those who defined themselves as “radicals” in the beginning of their involvement in local activism. They also perceived “real deeds” as a means of political struggle. There were three important features of their attitudes towards the activity they were involved in: the main goal of the local group was perceived as an oppositionist struggle, the other people were criticized for their incomprehension of the intrinsic connection of local problems and politics, and the “real deeds” were significant for them only as a strategy to accomplish political goals.

The first tendency can be illustrated by the example from Makar’s interview. When speaking about his group’s agenda, Makar emphasizes struggle with the authority in power through the elections, only briefly mentioning the monitoring of local problems.

“We are watching all the things which happen [in our city] - all the things, such as our park destruction issue. That is, we monitor them from time to time. Then, there is another thing, as far as all of us were involved in election observed, and we have as a *main goal* now to organize a common meeting, to get all the activists together, and to force all of them, all of them to participate in it, and to allocate the responsibilities – who will occupy the positions in Territorial Electoral Commissions and how ... we are going to organize the common meeting where we will distribute these positions, and we will try to occupy them and will seize the power in our neighborhood” (Makar, male, born in 1968, “Civic Association”).

Second, the “oppositionists” and most of the “oppositional thinkers” complained about the most group members’ political incompetence and their fear to speak and think about politics. In this regard, Gregory’s words are especially meaningful.

“«The Civic Platform<sup>29</sup>» – this is bosh, this is the political organ, but people who come there claim that they are out of politics! Tamara (one of the “Headquarters” member – S.E.) is a classical illustration of it on the lower level. ... We entrusted her with doing the project, and she failed. ... When at least a few people who would be ready to be municipal deputies and to participate in local elections come, the “Headquarters” will work again” (Gregory, male, born in 1984, “Headquarters”).

Kirill states it in his interview even more clearly:

“All the decisions made, even administrative ones, are political decisions. They change people’s lives, and they deal with the majority of people. ... When they are made, and people start to protest, and they are told: “don’t bring politics here”. But these decisions are political and they are made by people who are members of one political party. This is all politics.” (Kirill, male, born in 1986, “Headquarters”).

Finally, as far as the “oppositionists” and “oppositional thinkers” were interested in politics, and some of them were even involved in it, and long before the FFE movement emerged, they did not adopt the apolitical “real deeds” rhetoric as common sense; instead they perceived it as a tool to attract more people to political struggle. In the following passage, for example, Anton explains:

“We’ve decided that Kirill will be a candidate running for the deputy at Moscow Council Elections. And that’s why we’ve done a lot to make Kirill more known in our municipal district. ... The main goal is to have ten people from the “Headquarters” at the next elections who will run against the candidates from the party of power, and all these ten people would say – we’re from the “Headquarters” and for the last four years we did this and that” (Anton, born in 1987, male, “Headquarters”).

Thus, according to Anton and to most of the “oppositionists” and the “oppositional thinkers”, the “real deeds” activity is just a way or a tactic to involve the people in the political struggle and finally to change the whole political system. Sometimes these people insist that the “real deeds” tool cannot only help to attract citizens’ attention and to win citizen’s votes, but can also lead to the changes in the minds of ordinary habitats.

“The politics should be bottom-up. First, a person realizes that he needs a clean entrance hall, then, that he needs a comfortable backyard, then he realizes that he needs a good highway junction

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<sup>29</sup> Civic Platform is the oppositionist political party organized by a politician, Mikhail Prokhorov, in summer, 2012. It was portrayed as the political party of a new type – without leaders, ideology and rigid structure.

in his neighborhood, then he understands that the whole city of Moscow should be comfortable and good looking. And in order to have the whole of Moscow comfortable and good looking, he has to have good Moscow government. And Moscow government will be good as soon as the Russian government is good” (Galina, female, born in 1886, “Headquarters”).

Consequently, the “oppositionists” and the “oppositional thinkers” preferred to choose broader, more politicized tasks within the groups’ work, such as organizing rallies, agitating in the neighborhood, conducting public relations, and writing political leaflets.

Thus, in 2012-2013, most representatives of the “oppositionists” and the “oppositional thinkers” careers continued to accomplish the “political” goal of changing the Russian political system and even being involved in local collective action. They perceived it as a tool to “score political points” and to mobilize more people to activism, thus creating the opportunity to use their support in the struggle with the authority in power.

### **5.2.2. “Doers”: Two Approaches Simultaneously**

The analysis of the interviews with those “doers” who were available for the research in the beginning of groups’ emergence found out that most of them were “moderates” in a sense that they did not want to speak about politics in public, but at the same time, they used both “real deeds for their own sake” and “real deeds as a means of political struggle” for local activism. For example, when Pavel explains what the goals of the “Civic Association” are, he refers to “real deeds” activity as just a way to develop civic consciousness and influence the authority in power.

“[Our goal is] to look for some problems in our neighborhood, and to make the neighbors involved in their solution in order to awake civil society and to make the people able to influence their life settings, ... to influence the authority in power not only from the outside but also from inside.”

However, in another part of the interview, he refers to “real deeds” as a good in itself, criticizing the FFE movement:

“The people in the FFE rallies just protested for the sake of the protest. They just ranted for the camera, but it is necessary to do real deeds, and not only in Moscow.” (Pavel, born in 1969, male, “Civic Association”).

Viktor’s case can be another example here. He attacks the group for the absence of “real deeds”:

“There were more self-PR than real actions [in the “Headquarters”]. Kind of, write a post, and I will retweet you. But there were no real actions, such as making a bench or a lantern”.

However, he puts the political struggle on the top priority in another part of the interview:

“We have two main goals: the first is a political one, and it’s connected with Moscow Council Elections, and the second is the civic one, which is to attain the positive changes in our life here” (Viktor, born in 1987, male, “Headquarters”).

It may seem that Luba is an adherent of the “real deed for their own sake” approach. For example, she criticizes most of the protesters:

“I began to understand the senselessness of what was happening in the form it was happening, and that rallies were pointless. If I had to choose between attending a dubious, unauthorized rally with no clear point, or taking to the streets with [leftist protest leader Sergei] Udaltsov’s red flags, and really trying to do something in my neighborhood, I would choose to try and do something in my neighborhood.”

But later, she says that it’s better to hide the oppositional character of their group in order to involve more people in the struggle.

“I usually insisted that we need to talk less about that [oppositional politics] and to talk more about what we really do and than when a new person joins the “Headquarters”, he understands that people here are oppositionists” (Luba, female, born in 1995, “Headquarters”).

In other words, the “doers” shared the view on local activism which was closest to that which later would become a part of the new group style. Even in the beginning of their involvement, they tried to connect the apolitical and the political meanings of local activity. As can be seen below, these meanings would not only be present together in the dominant group style, but would also be linked essentially – to do “real deeds” would mean to struggle with the current regime, and vice versa.

### **5.2.3. “Volunteers”: “Real Deeds for Their Own Sake”**

Finally, the “volunteers” perceived local activism as a way to be involved in concrete problem solving in the beginning of their involvement in local activism. As Svetlana claims,

“We have such a mess and disorganization in our country because we all are interested in geopolitical problems and we don’t want to do something with, say, our entrance hall which is, I’m sorry, full of shit. We want to be interested in something which is so far from us where we won’t even be there” (Svetlana, born in 1981, female, “Headquarters”).

Then she continues explaining what local activism means for her: “It’s about to make the life of our neighbors better, and to make our city more comfortable to live in” (Svetlana, born in 1981, female, “Headquarters”).

The “volunteers” also highlighted that it was perfectly acceptable, from their points of view, to cooperate with representatives of the local authority in power if they could really help to solve concrete local problems. Tamara’s words are exemplary:

“Some of us are ok with cooperating with the party of power. ... Well, I’m ok with that too, I am ready to cooperate with them concerning the issues I find important. Other people say – no, we will speak with them only in court. ... I’m not fastidious in a political sense, I think if it’s about to do something good for the neighborhood, I can do it with the party of power” (Tamara, born in 1978, female, “Headquarters”).

Mila is on the same page as Tamara:

“Working as a journalist and communicating a lot with officials and deputies, I saw that there are enough people among them who try to do something in these conditions. Well, I won’t come to an ecological rally that is organized by the city administration itself, but if it’s organized by, say, some department on youth politics and I know that there are adequate guys there – I will come” (Mila, female, born in 1981, “Civic Association”).

Both doers and volunteers preferred to choose concrete tasks within the non-contentious groups’ campaigns, such as doing paperwork for the defense of public parks, taking pictures of urban development problems in neighborhoods, and writing articles about local problems for the groups’ newspapers.

Thus, the “volunteers” came to local activism being tired of meaningless protest politics and saw the idea of local collective action in getting very concrete and “real” things done.

To conclude, we can see that there is a connection between different activist careers and different approaches to local activism existing within new local groups in Russia in 2012-2013. At the first stage of their involvement in local activism, the “oppositionists” and the “oppositional thinkers” mostly perceived “real deeds” activity as a means of political struggle, while the “volunteers” and, partly, the “doers”, valued the “real

deeds” for the sake of themselves – the more “real deeds”, they thought, the better world would be. These differences can be explained by the specificities of their careers before the FFE movement, and, consequently, their attitudes towards the FFE movement itself. The “oppositionists” and the “oppositional thinkers” have been developing their interest to politics a long time before the FFE protest. When the FFE movement emerged, they were enthusiastic about the opportunity to meet other active people and to mobilize them into the struggle with the authority in power. They absorbed the “real deeds” rhetoric during the FFE rallies and brought it to local activism, but they used it in their own specific way – “real deeds” were perceived not as a good in themselves but were a means for political struggle. The “volunteers” and the “doers” were quite far from the “politics” before the FFE movement. They have been developing helping attitudes since youth, but they had never imagined themselves as political activists. That is why most of them perceived the “real deeds” rhetoric promoted by the FFE movement leaders as literary – this rhetoric just correlated with the experience that they have had before.

Thus, in 2012-2013, two opposite approaches to local activism faced with each other within each local group, and they were brought there by representatives of different careers. However, follow-up interviews and focus-groups conducted in 2014-2015 showed that the activists have overcome this conflict and were able to create a completely new group style, which can be seen as a sign of the crucial change in activist political culture in Russia.

### **5.3. New Group Style**

A few years later, in 2014-2015, the opposition between “moderates” and “radicals” softened. Juxtaposing “politics” to “real deeds” in favor of either of the former or the latter, both approaches were superseded during the evolution of the activist groups, by a new, third approach that united politics and specifics into a single frame (Žuravlev 2017<sup>30</sup>). For activists in the three groups, the “real deeds” principle became part of the oppositional politics, as most activists acknowledged that solving local problems and doing politics were two sides of the same activity. The reconciliation of these two approaches was crucial to the sustainability of the groups and the emergence of a new group style. The fourth group did not manage to solve this contradiction and almost fell apart because of it.

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<sup>30</sup> Oleg Zhuravlev was the first who noticed the integration of “real deeds” and “politics” into one frame within post-protest local activism. However, he argued that it happened soon after local activists groups were created, and even in “moderate” people’s approach to local activism, a political strategy was hidden (Žuravlev 2017). I show that “moderate” people’s approach of “real deeds” was juxtaposed to “radicals” political approach for a long time in local activism, and this juxtaposition at the first stage was necessary for their integration in the future. This description of local activism’s evolution based on the initial idea suggested by Oleg Zhuravlev and important corrections made by me appears for the first time in our co-published article (Zhuravlev, Erpyleva, Savelyeva 2017).

### 5.3.1. The Evolution of Thinking and Visions in Follow-up Interviews and Focus-Groups

Using the interviews repeated some time after the groups' emergence, and the focus-groups conducted in 2014, the evolution of attitudes and practices can be followed. For example, over time, Alexander, as a representative of the oppositional thinkers' career who held a radical position at the beginning of his civic involvement, developed a personal attachment to his city and attributed high value to solving local problems. During the focus-group conducted in 2014, he describes the changes he experienced during his involvement with the Civic Association:

“For the last two and a half years, our goals have changed. I moved from the energy of rejection to the energy of positive transformations. ... through local problem solving, I've started to see my city in another way and I've started to feel it in another way. I'd never thought I would be aware of my city. I'd never paid attention to my city's problems. ... I was aware of the problems connected to state politics but not the small ones. Now I see them. I see how the city could look like if we did not solve them. ... and our main goal now is to make people united, to make people do something, to make people solve their problems. And that is how we can save our city” (Alexander, born in 1989, male, “Civic Association”, focus-group).

The evolution to the opposite direction which led to the same result happened with the perceptions of some representatives of “doers” and “volunteers” careers. For example, Svetlana insisted on “real deeds for their own sake” approach in the beginning – she came to the local group being concerned with ecological problems in the neighborhood and with high utility charges for the apartment. She perceived the group goal as dealing mainly with problems like that. In the follow-up interview conducted two years later (in December 2015), she criticizes those who are concerned only with close-to-home issues and not relate them to “politics.” Basically, she criticizes her own initial believes:

“[“Real deeds” and “politics”] are interrelated, the one depends on the other. And people unfortunately do not understand it. They come to the “Headquarters” and they want to deal only with bike paths ... they are concerned by nothing but bike paths or playgrounds. And they are afraid of politics, they think politics has nothing to do with them.” (Svetlana, born in 1981, female, “Headquarters”, follow-up interview).

Thus, in December 2015, she is critical to both “real deeds for their own sake” approach and “real deeds as a means of political struggle” approach. During the focus-group conducted with the “Headquarters” members in

2014, Anton describes the changes that occurred within the “Headquarters” in a quite similar way:

“This conflict [between “radicals” and “moderates”] took place long ago, and we didn’t have an urban municipal improvement project at that time, and then it emerged and we’ve understood that it is the same [as political struggle]. Because our authorities do not do it. Our oppositionism is in that they cannot do it in a good way, so, we can do it in a good way. There is no such conflict any more” (Anton, born in 1987, male, “Headquarters,” focus-group).

Most people who supported the “real deeds for their own sake” approach at the beginning of their involvement left local activism after some time, as did Tamara and Gleb. Others, such as Mila, a representative of volunteers’ career, began to participate more in politics. After agreeing to cooperate with the party in power to solve local problems at the beginning of her involvement, Mila decided to run against the party in the local elections in 2014 and even organized a campaign against fake news and propaganda developed by the authorities in power. In 2015, interviews with the members of the “People’s Council” and the “Public Council” show how “moderates” can be seen and expressed doubts about the “real deeds for their own sake” approach.

“And you think, “That’s it. I will complete the last task, and that’s it!” But the people ask for help, and you think, “Why not? I know how to do it, and I can do it.” But thinking globally, I do not understand what I do it for. I thought that the system would change, and my [real deeds] activity would help to change it. But I cannot say anymore that it makes sense. ... it’s a kind of an endless circle—you can continue to repair the benches, [but] this will not change the system. Or it will be changed over ten generations, and I will not see that, and my children will not see that” (Roman, male, 1974, “People’s Council”).

Thus, in the evolution of post-protest local activism, most groups were able to form a new way to think and to act that presupposed the abolition of the opposition between “politics” and “real deeds” by linking the two logics. In the following, it is argued that they were thus able to create a new group style.

### **5.3.2. Why This Is a New Group Style?<sup>31</sup>**

It can be seen how apolitical and political trends have mingled in the new local activism. The rapprochement between the apolitical and political

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<sup>31</sup> This section is a result of the collective work of my colleagues Oleg Zhuravlev and Natalia Savelyeva and me. It will also appear in the co-published article (Zhuravlev, Savelyeva, Erpyleva forthcoming).

was also present in earlier, pre-protest local activism. However, in case of the new local activism, the emergence of relatively sustainable and reproducible styles of collective action is dealt with. According to Nina Eliasoph and Paul Lictermann, a group style is a set of notions shared by members of small groups, the group's attitude to the outside world ("group boundaries"), the way the group's members perceive themselves ("group bonds"), and the discursive practices they use to discuss problems relevant to the group ("speech norms") (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003: 785). Is there a specific group-style in the post-protest local activism?

How do the activists imagine the border separating their groups from the outside world? On the one hand, this border is conceived in the spirit of the FFE movement, as a frontline between citizens and the authorities, as embodied by Putin and United Russia, and, on the other hand, in terms of a local activism that gives priority to neighborhood problems. The superimposition of these borders has given rise to a stable notion of themselves as active citizens of their districts, fighting the authorities at the grassroots. The localization of opposition activism has in no way elided the opposition between active "citizens" and the corrupt and authoritarian authorities. On the contrary, by contrast with the abstract, moralistic notion of honest citizens battling the dishonest Putin, typical of the FFE movement protesters, the image of the conflict between people and authorities has become much better-defined and specific in local activism.

Turning to the second element of the group style, "group bonds", it can be seen that a hybrid perception of the neighborhood as, on the one hand, something whole in the sense of a set of specific problems and, on the other, as a Russia-wide grassroots community "scattered across the neighborhoods" (as one interviewee put it). Despite the attachment to familiar places and the image of a "neighborhood's active citizens," Russian local activists usually do not see each other as local residents, but rather as grassroots activists in general. Local activists, with some exceptions, see no essential differences among residents of a given district or town and the residents of Moscow and St. Petersburg as a whole. As Mark states in the interview:

"[Our task] is to make the life [of the neighborhood's residents] and people generally and the city comfortable. Well, at least to improve one's little corner so that . . . You see, the environment in Russia is so aggressive that no one here feels comfortable" (Mark, male, born 1964, "Public Council").

In this interview excerpt, it can be seen that your own little corner differs from the city per se only in terms of scale. Roman has similar memories: "At some point, I went into the courtyard of my building and decided that our city was so awful" (Roman, male, born 1974, "People's Council"). In other words, when he went into his courtyard, he saw his city, not his neighborhood. As they do not see each other as locals and their relationships are not formed by an experience of living together in neighborhoods, their

attitudes towards their localities could be named as both strategically attached and friendly instrumental.

Concerning “speech norms”, local activists have elaborated a “hybrid” vocabulary of motivations that fuse the ethics of getting real things done and oppositionism, which has already been discussed above. Showing how group styles work, Lichterman and Eliasoph give examples of how discursive practices that do not conform to group styles are excluded from the space of communication or are not supported by members of the group. Similarly, in the case of post-protest local activism, by conforming to an idiom or vocabulary of motivations based on a synthesis of “real deeds” and “politics”, activists have excluded “real deeds” without “politics” and “politics” without “real deeds” from their group’s discursive and practical commons. Thus, as has already mentioned above, several activists who wanted to be involved only in “real deeds for their own sake” gradually left the groups. For example, in one of the interviews, a female activist said how she had wanted to take up the issues of rape and the neighborhood’s veterans, but her aspirations were not supported. She could not persuade other group members to join her since her proposals seemed too remote from what the group was supposed to be doing.

As a whole, members of the new groups see themselves and talk about themselves as “citizens of [their] neighborhoods” who do battle with specific people, groups, and companies that are affiliated with United Russia and negatively impact the lives of local residents. These people are involved in opposition politics, but in the form of “real deeds”, this can be done together, regardless of ideological proclivities, but with the obligatory condition of opposition to Putin and the existing regime.

There are, of course, more contextually-based styles of interactions within local activism. For example, speaking with the local residents, the activists usually use “real deeds” rhetoric, but while speaking with the political allies from the opposition, they emphasize the political dimension of their activity. Eliasoph and Lichterman (2014) write about such contextually-based styles as “styles of scene”, referring thus to the phenomenology of Erving Goffman. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight here that apart from the “styles of scene” that depends mostly on a contextual interactional setting, most of local groups’ members started to share the understanding of what civic activism is in general, and this understanding was different from that of both pre-protest local activists and the FFE movement protesters. Thus, the new group style can be identified within the new local activism. How did this become possible?

### **5.3.3. How the New Group Style Has Emerged**

The main argument here is that the new groups’ style, which signifies an important change in Russian activist political culture, has emerged as a result of interactions between representatives of different types of careers, which brought different meanings and visions to the same local groups. Thus, two main factors influenced the new group style formation: the first is the meeting of the people with different experiences and know-how in the

same time and place who would not have ever met if it were not for and because of the FFE movement; the second is long lasting interactions among them in a different settings, including “political” ones (such as, municipal elections) and “close-to-home” ones (such as, the campaigns for the saving of yards or parks). These two factors are considered in more detail.

First of all, the synthesis of “real deeds” and “politics” produced in the new local activism was possible due to the emergence of one more type of “hybrids”, the so-called biographical hybrids. On the one hand, people have met in the post-protest local groups whose lives would hardly have intersected outside the FFE movement. On the other hand, the FFE mobilization contributed to the fact that previously incompatible experiences and values have been combined in the lives of the same people, for example, the value of personal self-realization, professionalism, and political activism.

The analysis of the biographical interviews with members of the post-protest local groups made in Chapter IV revealed four different activist careers, leading to involvement in the new local activism: “doers”, “volunteers”, “oppositional thinkers” and “oppositionists”. Ordinarily, these four careers rarely intersect and shape different social institutions: apolitical professionalism, apolitical volunteer social organizations, focused on helping individuals but not on changing the ground rules, professional big politics, as reflected in the competition among political parties, and “kumbaya” oppositionism in the social networks. During the popular protests of 2011–2012, representatives of these different careers came together in the same place, and later, thanks to the event of the FFE movement, they wound up in the same local groups. People who had been active at school met up with people who had hated this activism as a chore. People who believed in charity made the acquaintance of people who had criticized it as pointless and as something that propped up the current system instead of combating it. People who had always tried to do specific, tangible, and effective things, albeit on a small scale, encountered people who preferred to reflect on the world’s big problems. The intersection of these careers within the new local activism partly shaped its hybrid nature.

Aside from bringing together activists whose paths had not previously crossed, the event of the FFE protest also facilitated the fusion of various experiences and know-how in the same careers. Thus, a focus on personal realization and a successful professional career has usually been contrasted with a focus on social and political activism, which presumes that a person is forced to sacrifice career, family, and free time for the sake of their work. However, the lives of the individual members of the new local groups have shown that the idea of personal development and overcoming personal crises, and the notions of professionalism, hobby, and activism have combined in different proportions as post-protest local activism has progressed in the lives of some its proponents. People, who, on the eve of the FFE movement, were going through personal crises and could not find their place in life, discovered their calling in post-protest local activism. People who had devoted their lives to professionalism in a particular field and had been passionate about it for its own sake for many years, at some

point realized that local activism would help them become better professionals, and that their professional skills make them better activists. Moreover, some of them went through a personal crisis because their beloved profession seemed pointless; local activism, on the contrary, endowed it with meaning by uniting it with higher ends. Thus, as they worked in the post-protest local groups, some of our informants acquired their life's calling, a vocation in the sense defined by Weber (1958).

Good examples of such hybrids are Egor ("Headquarters") and Mila ("Civic Association"). Egor was educated as a programmer, but for many years he had worked as a manager at an oil company, doing work he personally found uninteresting, but which paid well. After he was laid off, he discovered he had forfeited his programming skills and worked part-time as a gypsy cab driver. This moment in his life coincided with his vigorous involvement in the FFE protest, and subsequently, he attended most opposition rallies and events. In 2012, after accidentally seeing a help wanted ad for Probok.net ["No Traffic Jams," a crowdsourced internet-based project, partly sponsored by the Moscow City Government, for solving the city's extreme traffic problems], he got a job there, since, as a cab driver, he was upset with the city's endless traffic jams. Becoming more and more enthusiastic about solving the city's transportation problems, his political views moderated. He became convinced that cooperation with the authorities was necessary to solve specific problems. While taking part in Alexei Navalny's mayoral election campaign in his neighborhood, he met "Headquarters" activists and joined the group. At the same time, he gained admission to the Higher School of Urban Studies, having decided to engage with the city's problems professionally. Until he was actively involved in a local group's routine work, his politicization and professionalization progressed in parallel, unconnected with each other. In some sense, they were at odds with each other. Because of the FFE protest, his political views radicalized, while at the same time, they became more moderate due to his job at Probok.net. Only his post-protest activism brought together his social causes and his professional practice. Thus, for example, Egor became actively engaged in all of the group projects having to do with municipal improvements. A simple desire to combat traffic jams was transformed into the idea of professional self-realization in urban studies, which has become inalienable from active involvement in the reconstruction of his own district. When he was asked why he was involved in the work of the local activist group, Egor explained, "Because I live here, in this district, and I want it to improve. Besides, being involved in social activism, I have begun to understand how political power is construed and how the various social forces in the city interact, and this is something I need as an urbanist" (Egor, male, born 1966, "Headquarters"). He does not simply employ his professional skills in activism. The activism itself makes him a better professional.

Mila's trajectory represents an especially exemplary case of how a self-realization project, professionalism, and activism can be connected. Mila has chosen her profession in adolescence: she had tried to pass the examination to enter the journalist department of the St. Petersburg State

University twice, but failed. Finally, she entered the library department in another college but left it after a few years. When explaining this decision, Mila says that she cannot do the things she sees no meaning in. She found a job as a reporter at the local TV station, and then she worked in different local newspapers. At that time, Mila became interested in covering local problems of the neighborhood. Then Mila gave birth to two children, took a break in journalism, and tried to organize a center for children in her neighborhood. Explaining this break, she refers not only to family situation, but also to a feeling of senselessness about her journalist work, which had no actual goal. However, the effort of the children's center organization was unsuccessful and she gradually came back to the freelance journalist work in local newspapers. During the time of the FFE protest, she followed all the events and defined herself as a supporter of the movement, but did not visit the rallies. Being the mother of little children, Mila participated in the campaign against burning at the garbage dump and met there a few activists from "Civic Association". A year later, she helped to organize a local debating club on the basis of the newspaper she worked in and met the leader of "Civic Association" again. It was the time when the group was preparing for the municipal elections and the leader of the group persuaded Mila to be among group's candidates. After the elections, Mila started to do some journalist work for "Civic Association" and then became one of the group activists. She participated in all the group meetings and specialized in group press releases and the media coverage of group activity. In one year, she started to help other activist groups to cover their work. She explained that as a journalist she knew how to attract media attention to a problem. The groups she helped by paying her some small money, so she did not need to do another paid job. In the follow-up interview, Mila also explains that activism gave her the sense and the meaning for professional activity and for life in general:

"Activism is the most important thing in my life, the only thing which is really significant. Of course, besides the children and some other important things... I mean, if we take all things I am involved in, the activism is the only one that is valuable for me. Why did I take quite a big break in my journalist career? Because I understood that I could not write a single word if I did not understand why I was doing it. That is, the journalism – I think it should serve to some greater cause, to be really significant. ... I didn't quite understand who I was doing it for before. I understand it now" (Mila, female, born in 1981, "Civic Association," follow-up interview).

At the time of the last follow-up interview, she claims that changing Russian journalism and turning its attention towards really significant political problems is her activist and professional mission. Thus, Mila acquired purpose in her life and became a professional journalist in activism and a professional activist in journalism. The idea of personal self-realization,

professionalization, a paid job and a political activist project merged in her biography.

The event of the FFE movement has thus led to the emergence in post-protest activism of new hybrid lives. On the one hand, people with careers that ordinarily took them in different directions suddenly found themselves together. On the other hand, different kinds of know-how that ordinarily are at odds with each other suddenly became parts of a single whole. These hybrids contributed to the politicization of the new local activism.

However, the second important factor of new group style formation should be also taken into account – the settings in which the representatives of different careers and different know-how interacted. As shown elsewhere (Zhuravlev, Savelyeva, Erpyleva forthcoming), the members of the post-protest local groups have become involved in collective local practices having political meaning, including involvement in municipal district elections, the publication of opposition newspapers and leaflets, and public discussions with the local authorities.

One of the turning points in the evolution of the post-protest local activist groups was when they became involved in elections to municipal district councils, which are not legislative bodies, but are primarily charged with overseeing tiny budgets for improving local amenities. Reflection on involvement in municipal district council campaigns quite often reveals the tactical aspect of “real deeds”.

“Yes, I’m more inclined to a political approach. [...] First, there are lots of political activists, and second, they say the right things when they are involved in local affairs. It is due to these affairs that people are already quite familiar with [Andrey names three activists]. They are getting their hands dirty dealing with playgrounds, gardens, and bike paths, and people have seen them on TV and outside, when they talked with them. They have seen them at presentations and collecting signatures on petitions. People already know them, and so when there are elections of municipal district councilors, they might vote for them, despite all the obstacles” (Andrey, male, born 1982, “People’s Council”).

As they have become involved in municipal district council election campaigns, the activists have, one way or another, had to deal with various issues and projects simultaneously. By that, members of the new groups do “real deeds” and take part in opposition politics at the same time. As Leda explains, the conflict between “real deeds” and “politics” is often overcome when people start to work together a lot on practical issues:

“Well, you know, in our group there is also such a division: there are people who are for “real deeds” and there are those who think that it’s necessary to be involved in big politics. But when we went here, went down to earth and all this was adjusted. The group is small and the problems we deal with are such that we understand

– it’s better to combine “real deeds” and “politics” optics. All of these [problems we deal with] are actually both [“real deeds” and “politics”]” (Leda, female, born in 1958, “People’s Council”).

Besides for political interactions, the activists started to communicate with each other informally with time. They never invited their old pre-activist period friends to the local activism, but they started to perceive other group members as friends, or at least as “buddies” (priyateli). Many activists would celebrate birthdays together with the group members or would have a couple of drinks with some of them sometimes. Interestingly, at the events such as birthdays’ celebration, non-activist and activist friends are never mixed – a person would rather has two separate birthday celebration with two groups of friends than invite politicized and apolitical friends to the same party. It is typical for the local groups’ members to stay for longer after regular group meetings just to discuss the news and to hang out together. The observational fieldnotes taken by me after one of such meetings of “Civic Association” show how the informal communication between the representatives of different activist career, who initially supported different approaches to local activism – Alexander, Mila, and Ivan – look like:

The initial idea was to meet at “Civic Association” office in order to discuss the result of the local election and to celebrate the hard work of activists by drinking. My colleagues and I were invited as far as we participated in the election as independent observers coordinated by “Civic Association” as well. We met several activists near the office, but Alexander, the informal group leader who had the key from the office, has been late for 30 minutes already. That is what I have written in my fieldnotes: “Ivan calls Alexander and reports us back – ‘He is just leaving his apartment!’ He hangs up and says – ‘I’ll kill him, what’s the fuck, we are waiting for an hour already’ etc. Mila supports him – ‘Yeah, let’s just go away!’ So we go somewhere to a bar to drink. We enter the closest one, but Mila insists that we need to go to city center [which 15 mins by bus from the area we were], we need just to leave him here, like, let him sit in the office alone. She says all this in a playful way, like she is laughing, she says – ‘I should save Ivan from the murder, if we meet Alexander, he will kill Alexander!’ But Ivan looks really angry and upset.” We went to the city center and picked a bar there. At some time, Alexander joined us. That is what written in my fieldnotes: “At that time, Alexander joins us. I haven’t seen how Ivan met Alexander, but I see no conflicts, all people are laughing, making jokes, all of them look like they are glad to see Alexander.” (Observational fieldnotes, September 2014, “Civic Association”).

We see thus that everything that might look like conflicts for the outsiders can be actually better described from inside as shared ways of informal

communication through joking and laughing with each other. Not only the interactions around “activists” issues but also constant informal interactions contributed to the creation of the new group style<sup>32 33</sup>.

Gradually, under the influence of interactions between activists with completely different visions and know-how, and inspired by the experience of eventful politicization at the FFE rallies, the practices of collective action brought together or, rather, integrated “politics” and “real deeds” into a single frame or group style. They were no longer opposed to each other, nor did they relate to each other as ends and means. They had fused.

#### **5.4. Conclusion**

In 2012-2013, when the new local activism had just emerged, two opposite and sometimes conflicting approaches to what local activism means existed within it. The first implied that “real deeds” is good in itself, and concrete problem solving should be the primary goal of the groups’ activity. This approach was shared by the representatives of the “volunteers” and the partly “doers” careers, who took the “real deeds” rhetoric promoted during the FFE rallies literally and brought it to a post-protest local activity. The second approach presupposed that “real deeds” is just a means of political struggle, which can be used for the achievement of the groups’ primary goal – the changes in the Russian political system. The “oppositionists” and the “oppositional thinkers” brought this vision to local activism, borrowing the idea of “real deeds” from the FFE movement as well, but applying it in their own way. However, the follow-up interviews and focus-groups conducted in 2014-2015 reveal the evolution in activists’ visions and actions. The opposition between “real deeds” and “politics” was no longer present. How has that happened?

First, the opposite approaches to activism brought to the local groups by representatives of different careers that ordinarily take them in different directions met each other at the same time and place. Second, different kinds of know-how that ordinarily are at odds with each other, suddenly became parts of a single whole after and under the influence of the FFE movement. Third, the local activists practice various local campaigns, including election campaigns, which presuppose both “real deeds” and “political” activity. All these tendencies, on the one hand, dragged “real

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<sup>32</sup> The relational dimension, i.e. how people are connected to other people, their relationships and social ties, and the shared style of their informal communication, is definitely an interesting aspect of the new local activism evolution, even beyond the question of new activist culture creation, and may deserve a separate analysis.

<sup>33</sup> We see that informal connections among the activists and friendship ties matter for the local groups’ sustainability. Based on this observation, we may try to explain part of the new local activism culture by the Soviet legacy of so-called public-private (Oswald and Voronkov 2004) discussions about political issues among friends and neighbors in the communal kitchens. However, this visible similarity is not that convincing when we look at how exactly activism/politics and friendship were connected in both cases. In late Soviet time, trust among friends was the necessary condition for the emergence of public-private conversations. In the case of the new local activism, people did not invite “old” friends to the activist groups – conversely, former strangers may become friends after some time. “Public” did not emerge out of the private, on the contrary, new private trust was created sometimes out of collective public practice.

deeds” into “politics”, and, on the other hand, grounded “politics” in specific issues. Politicization occurred, not due to bypassing “real deeds” in favor of the so-called political struggle, but by integrating the former and the latter.

## CHAPTER VI. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This study set out to explore the following question: how can a biographical analysis help us to explain cultural changes resulted after an event? In this chapter, the answer to this question is made and the empirical results of the research are discussed.

The chapter is organized in the following way. First, the problem which was stated in the Introduction is discussed and a general explanation of it is suggested. This explanation is basically a summary of main results of the dissertational research. However, for the more concerned reader, in the next several sections of this chapter, the results in light of the theories presented are discussed. In the second section, a discussion about event and biography are introduced. In the third section, a switch is made to a discussion about political culture and local activism. In the fourth section, event, biography, and political culture are discussed together, specifying how the theoretical argument contributes to the ongoing academic debate. The limitations of the research are then considered, as well as possible directions for future work. Finally, the importance of the results of my research beyond academia is traced.

### ***6.1. Event, Biography and Political Culture: Summary of the Main Arguments***

This section is the best for a reader who has just read an Introduction and is wondering now what are the answers to the questions posed there. In this section, short but substantive answers are proposed. So, what this monograph is about? A new type of politicized local activism is analyzed that emerged as an outcome of the nationwide post-election 2011-12 protests in Russia, which were widely criticized for their political vagueness. Considering this political evolution, the focus is on the activists' biographical trajectories.

The premise is that existing theories fail to fully explain the crucial change in activist political culture in Russia which took place in local activism emerged as a consequence of the nationwide "For Fair Elections" movement. In the literature, the very fact of the emergence of "spin-off" movements, which are smaller in scale, is usually explained by the protesters' efforts to avoid repressions. However, this explanation does not work in the Russian case simply because the Russian state started to implement the first repressions at least two months after groups were created. At the same time, the specific features of "spin-offs" are usually attributed by scholars to the consequences of routinizations of the most successful parts of the early movements' repertoire (Tarrow 1993, McAdam 1995). This explanation also does not fit Russian reality. During the "For Fair Elections" movement, protesters mainly took part in mass rallies while they believed the necessity of concrete and "real" deeds. In post-protest local

activism, quite the opposite occurred. People were involved in concrete problem solving, but they did not oppose their activity to “politics” anymore. Rather, they perceived it as a part of politics. Neither repertoire of action nor the activist political culture were borrowed from the “For Fair Elections” movement and routinized, but were created right after the “For Fair Elections” protest in the new local activism itself.

Thus, basing on qualitative data (interviews, focus-groups, and observations of local activists groups organized in Moscow and St. Petersburg) and the existing theories of social movement studies, social events, and political socialization, a new way to analyze cultural changes in relation to event and biography is suggested.

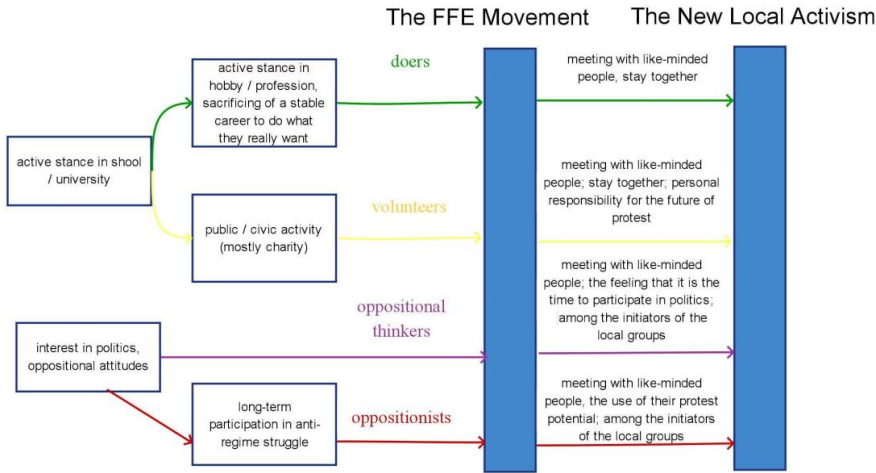
Five main empirical conclusions can be made as a result of the analysis of the empirical data.

**First**, the very fact of local activism emergence out of the “For Fair Elections” movement is explained. While participating in nationwide rallies with abstract political agenda, the protesters still believed in the necessity and meaningfulness of “real” deeds, but the “For Fair Elections” movement itself, as a number of rallies left no chance to get real things done. Politicization of election observation made participation in the presidential election attractive for many protesters as a concrete and real civic practice with visible results (fair voting in the particular voting station). Thanks to the institutional organization of elections by municipal districts (where each municipal district has its own territorial election commission), activists from the same neighborhood had to be united in groups in order to coordinate each others activity and the monitor the activity of territorial commission’s officials. During the day of the election, they finally saw the concrete results of their activity and were inspired by them. That is why they decided to continue getting real things done with the neighbors they met in the polling stations and created local activist groups.

**Second**, social composition of local activism is analyzed. People who became involved in local activism after the nationwide post-electoral protest had similar social positions, closed to the middle-class and intelligencia, and thus represented the core participants of the “For Fair Elections” movement. Most came from highly educated intelligentsia families, and many attended high-level specialized schools and had politicized relatives. All had higher education themselves. They also mostly represented the same generation.

**Third**, different individual paths of involvement into local activism are defined. Behind this visible homogeneity of social composition, there were four different individual paths of involvement in local activism, or different activist careers. In the “doers” career, people took active roles in traditional institutes of socialization (e.g., school and college) from early childhood, and the “For Fair Elections” movement pushed their activity toward more politicized fields. The “volunteers” career began with the experience of non-contentious civic activity (mostly, charities) outside the traditional institutes of socialization, a rarity in Russian society. The “For Fair Elections” movement led to short-term politicization, followed by withdrawal into moral engagement through volunteering. Those in the “oppositional thinkers” career gained an interest in politics and critical

attitudes toward the political regime before the “For Fair Elections” movement and realized their interest in the sphere of local problem-solving afterward. Finally, the “oppositionists”’ career involved actual participation in protest politics long before the “For Fair Elections” mobilization and shifted interest from anti-regime politics to the local politics of real deeds afterward. The careers are schematically described in the graphic below.



**Fourth**, the connection between paths of involvement and ways of perception and acting (“rhetoric”) in local activism is established. The “real deeds” rhetoric, which was popular within the “For Fair Elections” movement, was brought to local groups by representatives of all career types, but was interpreted and translated in different ways depending on the socialization pathways. The “doers” and the “volunteers” came to local activism to do “real deeds” in a literal sense, while the “oppositionists” and the “oppositional thinkers”, in contrast, were not really interested in “real deeds” in themselves but used them as a tool to mobilize ordinary citizens in political struggle.

**Fifth**, the politicized character of local activism which was a result of its four-year evolution is explained. With the decline of the “For Fair Elections” movement and enthusiasm, many local activists returned to the social, humanitarian, or professional activities in which they were involved before the movement. Others succeeded in reconciling different approaches to the “real deeds”/“politics” opposition, thus creating the new hybrid group styles. The role of the event of the “For Fair Elections” movement in the emergence of the new group style was crucial. It made people with activist careers that ordinarily take them in different directions suddenly find themselves together, and made different kinds of experiences that ordinarily are at odds with each other parts of a single whole. This combination of apolitical and politicized experiences and know-how within the same local groups and even the same lives made the hybrid group-style possible, which negotiated habitual opposition between the apolitical and the political.

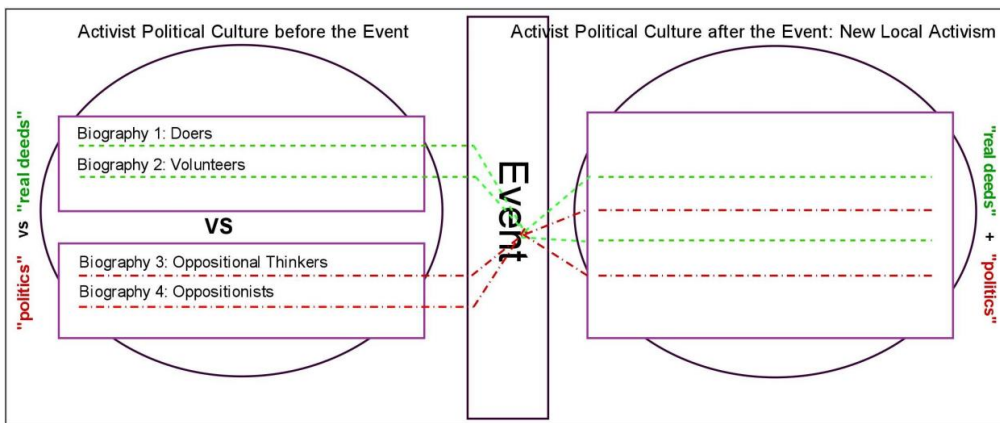
The empirical findings summarized above are important, not only for their own sake, but because they also help the proposal of a new approach to analyze cultural changes caused by political events, such as, for example, big protest mobilizations. This approach is based on the attending people's early socialization and biographies in the analysis.

In order to explain how *the very fact* of the changes occurs, structural factors such as specificity of regime transformations and repressions should be taken into account, but they are not always enough. The Russian case has shown that it is not structural (repressions implemented by the state), but rather cultural and institutional factors help us to understand how local activism emerged out the "For Fair Elections" movement. Even being unprecedented and huge, the event of nationwide post-electoral protest still reproduced an apolitical "real deeds" culture. Thus, the protesters were culturally forced to want to get real things done and at the same time felt impotence in influencing on anything during rallies. When the "empty institution" of election observation was fulfilled by new civic content and meaning, protesters found that monitoring the election can be that same concrete and real activity. As soon they met each other, not at the big rallies, but within small municipal districts (which is the basic unit of any election in Russia, thanks to its institutional organization), they realized that the neighborhood was the only place where they could really influence things and to do something concrete and real. Thus, they created new local groups. That is how cultural and institutional factors may contribute to the very fact of the emergence of spin-off movement after a big political event.

However, it is still unclear from this explanation how this particular type of activism has emerged, in other words, how *the particular changes* in political culture were possible. Research of political culture in itself, that is, the ways of how people think and act, how they frame their activity, what repertoire of contention they share, may help to detect what kind of change occurs. Thus, in the Russian case, it has shown that instead of "real deeds" ethics promoted at the "For Fair Elections" rallies, a new type of ethics and group style emerged in local activism, which bridged the apolitical and the political together. But even political culture approach still does not explain why this specific group style emerged, or, to put it in other way, why this particular change has happened. The main claim in the dissertation is that the third element, besides structure and political culture, which was mostly ignored in previous research should be added to the analysis of cultural changes through an event. This element is people's socialization and biographies.

Looking at the empirical results and answering the question of how exactly the event of the "For Fair Elections" movement did influence new group style emergence within local activism, it is clear that it did so by creating the place for meeting the people with different experiences who would never met before, and who were able to bring different meanings and know-how to local activism, thus creating finally new politicized cultural hybrid. In the scholarly literature on an event and a biography, biographies are usually considered among the things an event can influence, together with social structure, and cultural meanings. The argument made in this

dissertation is that in addition, the biography can be considered as an important tool, helping us to understand *how exactly* an event can influence structure or culture. The socialization taken in interactionist perspective, i.e., as the careers and not as the set of more or less stable dispositions, is a necessary tool to study how different experiences, visions, and know-how are accumulated, transferred from one place to another, and find each other's in the same groups or even the same lives, and how all these processes finally contribute to the creation of new elements of a political culture. In order to fully explain social movement transformations and changes produced by an event, people's biographies should be brought back into the analysis. This theoretical argument is schematically drawn at the graphic below.



This is the essence of both empirical and theoretical arguments presented in the dissertation. However, concerned readers probably would not be satisfied with this. In the following, the most interesting elements of the arguments are discussed, situating them at the same time in current academic debates.

## 6.2. Event and Biography

The empirical results of the research show that despite the similar social background of the local activists, they became involved in civic politics through four different careers: the “doers” career, the “volunteers” career, the “oppositional thinkers” career, and the “oppositionalists” career. What do these results tell us about biography/socialization in their relation to political involvement and an event?

First, they demonstrate that both political the socialization approach and the individual involvement into movements, taken separately, fail to fully explain political involvement through an event. As shown in Chapter I, political socialization scholars argue that people's political socialization starts with early childhood, but they consider it mostly as a number of more or less stable dispositions acquired at a particular age (Jennings and Niemi

1974, Niemi and Sobieszek 1977). At the same time, social movement researchers ignore the early socialization of activists and are only interested in the time of involvement itself, but they carefully examine the dynamics of this involvement (Della Pora 1995, McAdam 1990). The results show that these approaches could be combined in a particular way. Early socialization matters for an adult involvement, but not as a set of dispositions once acquired and then determine the future lives of individuals, but as constantly changing experiences that influence but do not determine one another.

Indeed, the representatives of all careers were pre-disposed to activism in some way. All of them were more or less active, even before nationwide mobilization. However, they were active in a different way, and the four careers correspond to the four types of such activities. Two of them are non-political ones: these were public activity at school or university and a professional or/and civic activity in some spheres not connected to the traditional institutes of socialization (such as charity). The other two are rather political ones: these were oppositional thinking with the sporadic experience of actual participation in political events and long-term participation in the oppositional struggle with the authority in power. Thus, again, in order to explain individual involvement in social movements, early socialization of future activists should be taken into account, as is claimed by political socialization scholars (Jennings and Niemi 1974, Niemi and Sobieszek 1977, Sherkat and Blocker 1994). However, it should be studied, not as set of predisposed factors, but rather in its dynamic, as individual involvement into movements approach presupposes (Della Porta 1995). It is not enough to determine what families the activists came from (as, for example, Doug McAdam found in his research, McAdam 1990), because most of them came from quite similar families. It is important to show how their visions and attitudes were developed through their life-courses, and how they accumulated their experience in a way that finally led to the activist involvement. This dissertation shows exactly how the “activist career” notion can be used as a tool for bridging the political socialization approach and the individual involvement into social movements approach.

Second, the results demonstrate why the continuity/conversion model of routine involvement in activism prevailing in scholarly literature is not sufficient to describe how the involvement through an event occurs. “Continuity” means that a person should have some dispositions to activism formed during socialization, in order to be involved in long-term civic/political participation, even if an event might reinforce/change them (Milesi et al 2006, Linden and Klandermans 2006, de Witte 2006). “Conversion” means that a person may become involved in long-term activism “in spite of his/herself” after an eventful experience, regardless of his or her previous dispositions (Blee 2002, della Porta 1995, Linden and Klandermans 2006, de Witte 2006). The continuity/conversion model has rarely been applied to the activist involvement through an event, but when it was, it implied that such involvement would mostly occur through both continuity and conversion. However, if the continuity with the previous

experience is indeed important, the role of an event itself does not have to be always be conceptualized as a conversion.

Thus, as it has been already stated above, all interviewees were predisposed to activism in a different way. The continuity with their previous experience was also crucial because, depending on their socialization pathways, they brought different meanings and know-how to local activism. But why we cannot simply say that they experienced conversion during the event of “For Fair Elections” movement as well? The lassical theory of socialization may help to deal with this question.

Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, in their famous book *Social Construction of Reality* (1966), introduce the distinction between secondary socialization (i.e., continuity) and resocialization (i.e., conversion). They write, explaining the basic difference between secondary socialization and resocialization:

“In re-socialization, the past is reinterpreted to conform to the present reality, with a tendency to retroject into the past various elements that were subjectively unavailable at the time. In secondary socialization, the present is interpreted so as to stand in a continuous relationship with the past, with a tendency to minimize such transformations as have actually taken place. Put differently, the reality-base for re-socialization is the present, while for secondary socialization, it is the past” (Berger and Luckmann 1966: 182).

A striking example of resocialization can be found in Igal Halfin’s (2002) description of how communist autobiography was constructed in early Soviet times. The communists told their biographies referring either to the passive self before the revolution turned into an active one later, or to a gradually developed activity which became consciously political after the revolution. The event of revolution was a crucial point to telling the autobiographies, and in all cases, the past was reinterpreted to conform to the post-revolution reality. The case of the event of the “For Fair Elections” movement and its effect on the storytelling is obviously the opposite. The interviewees did not tell the stories about their activity before the “For Fair Elections” movement and did not try to convince the listener that they were developing and nurturing their “activism” for a long time before. Nor did the activists perceive the “For Fair Elections” movement as something which divided their lives in before and after periods. In other words, they did not change their past in order to conform to the present reality. At least in the very beginning of their involvement in post-protest local activism, they interpreted the present to stand in a relationship with the past, trying to choose a local campaign to be involved in and to frame the activism, in general, according to the visions and know-how they had before the “For Fair Elections” movement. Thus, the new local activists experienced the “For Fair Elections” movement and then the local activism as a secondary socialization (or continuity) rather than as a resocialization (or conversion). Secondary socialization presupposes a specific type of relationship between

event, biography, lived and told experience, which differs from those of resocialization.

Does it mean, however, that the event of the “For Fair Elections” movement did not play an important role in local activists’ biographies? No, it does not. It just means that the role of this event should be conceptualized by other means than the “conversion” notion. The “For Fair Elections” movement, as an event, indeed played a critical role in their long-term activist involvement. These were the “For Fair Elections” rallies where the future local activists met many like-minded people, and they realized that they were not alone. They started to want to preserve their newly founded collectivity by doing something concrete together. It was the event of the “For Fair Elections” movement that opened both institutional opportunities (electoral campaigns on the municipal level) and formed cultural framework (“real deeds” rhetoric/politicization of election observation) for the new local activism. Moreover, the event of the “For Fair Elections” movement did open one more types of opportunities: the opportunities for the meeting of people with different careers and experiences who would never have met in the same place if it was not for the nationwide “For Fair Elections” protest. The protest event, thus, influenced people’s biographies and the new local activism a lot. It just did not “convert” individuals’ lives. How this relation between an event and a biography can be conceptualized is discussed in detail below. However, before proceeding to this discussion, the following shows how the results of the research contribute to the discussion on political culture.

### ***6.3. Local Activism, Political Culture, and Group Style***

In this section, the empirical results from the point of view of their contribution to the academic debate on political culture and, in particular, group style are discussed in two ways.

**First**, the results help to show that the “rise in generality” model (Boltanski and Thevenot 2006, Tocqueville 2006, della Porta and Piazza 2003, Lichterman 1996, Eliasoph 2011, Clement 2013) as the only and the main model describing the processes of democratization and politicization is problematic. Moreover, they help to complement this model, thus making it more suitable for the analysis of democratic civic politics.

In the first chapter of the dissertation, the political culture discussion is introduced, starting from the ways of how “political” and “local” are connected in research literature and activist discourse. Four types of such connections are described: the opposition of “local” as authentic and sincere to dirty and dishonest “politics” (Bennett 2013, Luhtakallio 2012); the avoiding of politics in public communications by activists as a strategy (Eliasoph 1996, Pacewicz 2015); gradual development of political thinking and practices through local problem solving (della Porta and Piazza 2003, Lichterman 1996, Eliasoph 2011, Clement 2013), and finally, the absence of any difference between “local” and “political” (Luhtakallio 2012). The research shows that post-protest local activisms fit none of these four logics.

In the very beginning of the emergence of the new local activism, the first two logics co-existed within the local groups in a conflicting way. Some local activists opposed “local” to “dirty politics”, while others saw their goal as primarily a “political” one, using “real deeds” rhetoric as a front in public settings. These rhetorics/approaches were not just the results of situational arrangements, but were rather the consequences of the rhetoric promoted at the “For Fair Elections” movement, mixed with the specificity of activist socialization. Some time later, the adherents of “real deeds” for their own sake, gradually developed broad political thinking in the way described by Tocqueville (2006), della Porta and Piazza (2003), or Clement (2013). However, the adherents of strategical usage of “real deeds” developed an understanding of the authentic value of small deeds as well. These two approaches bridged, and the new hybrid approach emerged. When this hybrid approach started to reproduce itself regularly in day-to-day communicational settings, it turned into what Eliasoph and Lictermann (2003) call group style.

It should be highlighted that in scholarly literature, the most widespread way to describe the processes of democratization and politicization that occur in local/civic activism is a “rise in generality” (Boltanski and Thevenot 2006, Tocqueville 2006, della Porta and Piazza 2003, Lichterman 1996, Eliasoph 2011, Clement 2013, Gladarev 2011, Miryasova 2013, Tykanova and Khohlova 2014). “Rise in generality” basically means that people start to be involved in civic activism because they are personally concerned with small, close-to-home issues, but dealing with them, they learn civic (and democratic) skills and competence and become aware of broader social and political problems. In his classic book, written after his travel to America in the first half of the 19th century, French political theorist, Alexis de Tocqueville, argued that that is basically how American democracy works. While illustrating the importance of local civic practices for democratization and politicization, the dissertation shows, at the same time, that scholars do not pay enough attention to another tendency, which contributes a lot to the democratization. This tendency is, in a way, a “drop in generality.” It refers to the situation when people start to be involved in politics, fighting for the abstract “regime change for the better,” but after some time, this abstract agenda becomes filled up with concrete content; when people start to be involved in activism using “close-to-home” rhetoric as a strategy to mobilize dwellers for political struggle, they feeling no concern themselves for the “small” issues around them, but end up being aware of the concrete problems around them. The research shows that sometimes only when a “rise in generality” and a “drop in generality” face each other, being experienced by people with different socialization pathways, truly democratic civic politics becomes possible.

**Second**, the empirical results allow us to pose and to answer the question that has not been posed and answered before: what are sources of the creation of one or another group style, and why, in any particular situation, the one and not the other group style emerge? From previous research, it is known that group styles borrow the elements of more broad political cultures and connect them in different ways (Eliasoph and

Lichterman 2003, Lichterman and Eliasoph 2014, Luhtakallio 2012). However, it was still unclear why, exactly, these particular elements are borrowed and why they are connected in one way and not in other. Based on the research, it is argued that scholarly attention to biography and socialization can shed light on the causes of the emergence of particular group styles. This argument itself consists of several parts.

First, it is shown that the meeting of people with different life-trajectories and thus different experiences and know-how is a crucial part of an explanation of the emergence of a particular group style. The people with the activist careers leading them in different directions suddenly met each other at the “For Fair Elections” movement. The “doers” and the “volunteers” were the people who were involved in different kinds of public activity, but they had never engaged in politics; the “For Fair Elections” movement not only intensified their activity, but made it closer to the political one. The “oppositionists” and partly “the oppositional thinkers”, on the contrary, were skeptical toward non-political activism, considering the struggle with authority in power as the main goal; the “For Fair Elections” movement made them involved, even in improvements of backyards, parks and other infrastructure in their neighborhoods. The most important is that the “For Fair Elections” movement brought together the “doers”/“volunteers” and the “oppositionists” who were opponents before: the first were involved in public activity at schools and the second hated this as obligatory and subject to the school administration; the first believed in charity and non-political volunteering and the second thought that the help particular people is senseless while the political system, in general, is not changed; the first wanted to do “real deeds” and the second used them instead as a means to mobilize people for the political struggle. These people met each other in local activism as a result of their participation in the “For Fair Elections” protest, and it was the connection of these different activist careers within one initiative that finally contributed to the new hybrid politicized group style.

Second, the research reveals that the combination of previously incompatible experiences and values in the lives of the same people as the result of big political event is another part of the explanation of the emergence of a new group style. The “For Fair Elections” movement influenced activists’ lives in the value of personal self-realization, professionalism, and political activism, which had rarely been a part of the same self-conceptions before they gradually came together. Thus, people’s self-conceptions were transformed into the hybrid ones and this transformation was crucial for the creation of a hybrid group style that united the apolitical and the political.

In the very beginning, all local activists brought “real deeds” rhetoric to local groups from the “For Fair Elections” movement, but the representatives of different careers interpreted and then translated these in different ways, corresponding to their previous socialization paths; if some of them came to local activism to get real things done, others intended to mobilize ordinary citizens to struggle with authority in power using “real deeds” rhetoric as a tool. It is telling that after some time, when the

enthusiasm experienced in the “For Fair Elections” movement began to decline, many of local activists came back to the activities they were involved before (for example, some of the “doers” started to spend their free time on the development of their hobbies, some of the “volunteers” on charity, some of the “oppositionists” on more broad oppositional campaigns). Among the people who became involved in local activism for a long period of time were the “oppositional thinkers”, those of the “doers” who were able to merge their hobby, occupation and local activity, and those of the “oppositionists” who started to build their political careers on a municipal level.

The results thus show that the transformations of individuals’ self-conceptions were necessary for successful, long-lasting activist careers, and these transformations created hybrid thinking that united apolitical small deeds, professionalism, and devotion to opposition politics. The “oppositionists” who stayed in local activism were not those who refused to do anti-regime politics in order to save the time for local activism, but rather those for whom local activism became the embodiment and realization of anti-regime politics. Similarly, the “doers” who did not leave local activism were not those who became active in politics instead of to be active in the field of hobby or profession, but rather those for whom to be a professional started to mean to be involved in solving local problems with passion. Finally, almost all the “oppositional thinkers” stayed in local activism for a long time. They were looking for the sphere of practical realization of their discontent before the “For Fair Elections” movement, and the “For Fair Elections” mobilization helped them to relate their negative attitudes towards the authority in power to the struggle with municipal authorities at the local level. The idea of personal development and the notions of professionalism, hobby, and activism have combined in different proportions as post-protest local activism progressed in the lives of some of its proponents. Howard Becker (1963) shows that for the successful occupational career of a dance musician, a change in his or her self-conception is necessary. Only when the musician thinks about himself, not as about “musician”, but just “a man who play commercial melody”, is the movement on the upper level of job hierarchy possible. A similar phenomenon can be seen in the case of activist careers: only when the meaning of “being oppositionist” or “being professional” has been changed for the individuals, are they were able to continue their long-term involvement in local activism. As a result of these changes, hybrid modes of thinking and action were created, and a new hybrid group style emerged. Berger and Luckmann (1966: 190) point out that “all men, once socialized, are potential ‘traitors to themselves’”. The post-protest local activists, in this sense, are real “traitors”, as they betrayed the part of their former selves in order to allow new ways of thinking and action to be part of it. Thus, this kind of self-“treason” is a necessary condition for the changes in political culture to be possible.

Finally, the third part of the explanation of how the new group styles may emerge lies outside of biographies and socialization, but it also should be taken into account. As shown elsewhere (Zhuravlev, Erpyleva, Savelyeva forthcoming), the actual practice of the participation of the activists in both

concrete one-issue campaigns and political electoral campaigns can contribute to the emergence of hybrid group style and thus changes in political culture as well. The representatives of all different careers who had a different, more or less politicized vision and thinking, have been taking part in local electoral campaigns together for a long time. Local electoral campaigns, in turn, presupposed both getting real things done as a way to win local neighbors' support and political struggle with competing parties, including United Russia. These two types of activity, merging together, also worked on creating new hybrid group style.

Thus, the question of how exactly the one and not the other group style may be created, that is, the question of the causes and explanations of the emergence of a particular group style have not been posed and answered in scholarly literature before. Based on the empirical results, an answer to this question is proposed. Three processes may explain why a particular group style is created, based on both of the elements of the old political culture, while, at the same time, changing the political culture. Two of them are directly related to the biographies and socialization. The meeting of people with different experiences and know-how in the same time and place as the result of big political event whose careers would hardly have intersected before the event, and the combination of previously incompatible experiences and values in the lives of the same people as the result of the event both contribute to the emergence of hybrid group styles, which connect the old elements of political culture in a new, original manner. Thus, the biographies serve as channels for transferring the experiences and know-how from one place to another through an event.

#### **6.4. Event, Biography, and Political Culture**

This is the last section and discusses the contributions that empirical results make to existing academic debates. Here, the argument looks at biography, event, and political culture, taken all together.

**First**, an event, itself, may receive a new conceptualization based on the results of the empirical research. In the literature, an event is usually described as something that turns people's trajectories in a new direction. However, this research shows that the "For Fair Elections" movement was not a turning point for most of the local activists if the turning point, in Abbot's sense, is the turn within the trajectory, which "contrasts with a relative straightness outside it" (Abbot 2001: 245). The careers of most interviewees developed directly toward more intensified activist involvement, and the "For Fair Elections" movement did not change their direction. The way of the "For Fair Elections" protest influence on local activists' biographies was not the directional turn, but rather, the connection of elements that were not connected before. Biographies taken in an interactionist perspective were the channels of the accumulation of experiences and their transfer from one place to another under the influence of an event. Thus, the role of an event, in general, in producing cultural changes can be reconsidered or, at least, considered more broadly. The

event may produce changes not only by creating something totally new or strengthening something already existent, but also by recombining the old elements of culture/experiences/know-how in a new, original way. As has been already stated above, the event-biography relationship should not be perceived only in the way that the event may influence biographies (even if it may and it usually does) but also in the way that biographies are the tools that help us to understand how an event may produce any change.

Second, the question of why any particular event may produce such changes was still unanswered and in this dissertation, it is answered based on the results of the research. In other words, why did the “For Fair Elections” movement and not any other big protest event lead to the changes in activist culture? The simple answer that it was the biggest nationwide protest that occurred in post-Soviet Russia since 1990s seems to be wrong. Actually, this was not the reason. The protest rallies against benefits monetization in 2005 were comparable with the “For Fair Elections” movement by the number of participants, as were some other big protests in certain cities (Clement 2013). Instead, the specificity of the “For Fair Elections” movement was that it did not end up, but started with a general and abstract agenda, such as the unfairness of the authority in power or its unwillingness “to see” protesters’ existence. This agenda was so abstract and vague that it has been criticized for its political vagueness and uncertainty by many scholars (see, for example, Clement 2013, Zhuravlev, Savelyeva, Alyukov 2015). However, this same vague and abstract agenda was unusual in the context of the culture of apoliticism, where most of the collective actions arose around concrete issues. At the same time, thanks to the culture of apoliticism, the rhetoric/ethics of “real deeds” was present at the “For Fair Elections” movement from the very beginning. Thus, the event of the “For Fair Elections” movement itself entailed a contradiction/conflict between the abstract and the concrete and thus attracted people with different experiences, ways of thinking and attitudes towards activism. “Fair elections” as the main part of its agenda led to the politicization of election observation, and institutional organization of the voting procedure in Russia (where a particular neighborhood in Moscow and St. Petersburg is a basic unit of election) and created a place and a time where neighbors participating in the “For Fair Elections” movement could physically meet each other. Thus, not a big and “important” event may lead to the changes in activist political culture by rearranging old elements of experiences and know-how and thus creating new hybrids, but only those that attract people with different experiences and pathways.

Meanwhile, it should be noted, that while being important and leading to the changes, the “For Fair Elections” movement, as an event, can not be equated with revolutions, which usually inspire the sociology of event. For example, in his research, Sewell shows that the event of the French revolution led to the creation of a new French nation. In case of the “For Fair Elections” movement, the changes detected took place at the bottom rather than on the level of state and nation. However, as one Russian poet famously stated, the spark can always become a flame.

## **6.5. Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

After discussing the contributions of this research in academic debates and before proceeding with some concluding remarks, highlighting the limitations of this research are needed, as well as possible directions for the future work.

First of all, the analysis conducted is based on the data collected from several local activists groups that emerged right after the “For Fair Elections” movement. Other groups, meanwhile, have been continuing to emerge in 2013, 2014, 2015 and even later. Moreover, the fieldwork took place from 2012 until 2016, which means that only four years of the groups’ existence have been explored. Thus, the research deals only with the ‘childhood’ of the new local activism. Based on the data, how local groups emerged out of nationwide post-election protest is explained, as well as how they developed and transformed during first several years, and how they contributed to the creation of a new, activist political culture. How the new group style started to reproduce itself during several last years of my fieldwork is observed, but this period of time is obviously not enough to claim that this group style will be sustainable for 10 or 20 years. The question of sustainability and reproduction of the new activist culture that emerged out of an event can be posed based on my research, but cannot yet be answered. This would be a fruitful direction for future research.

Another set of limitations comes from the fact that the research is done within one particular country. Of course, the results with more or less similar research done in different cultural contexts and to analyze Russian cultural and historical conditions, which could possibly influence the outcome were compared. However, this is not enough to treat the theoretical argument proposed here as an undoubtedly universal one. It can be argued that using Russia as a case study and taking into account its specificity, made it possible to create a new theoretical approach to an event, biography and political culture, which could be used in other cultural contexts. Nevertheless, in order to test this argument and to further develop it, the approach proposed should be tested in different cultural and historical settings. It is another possible direction for future research.

This research also illuminates several other problems are stated here, rather than addressed and this requires future analysis. The problem of activist disengagement arises: why did some people decide to leave the new local activism and come back to their previous activity after one or two years of involvement? Are there any careers (that is, a number of individuals following the same path) of disengagement? Could these careers tell us something about new elements of culture creation out of the event? Why some experiences and know-how do not contribute to this new culture and leave local activism together with their bearers?

Finally, the research highlights the role of profession in long-term activist involvement: a lot of local activists were those who used professional skills in politics and professionalized themselves through civic activity. Why did profession appear to be so important for the activism? The fact that profession and occupation are the crucial parts of human self has been known since Everett Hughes’ (1937, 1951) famous works. However, how

exactly are the activist careers in different spheres of politics and occupational careers of the activists are interrelated? This problem definitely deserves separate analysis and perhaps, another dissertation.

## **6.6. Epilogue: Why These All Matter?**

Is the contribution to the existing academic debate and the suggestion of a relatively new approach to study some phenomenon enough to perceive the research as important and meaningful? What this new approach for? Why is this phenomenon important to study? Does it matter at all beyond the academia, especially when the later is often criticized for living in an ivory tower?

It seems, even intuitively, that if something new emerged out of an event that may lead to the politicization and democratization of society, it is important for that society. But can we be sure that post-protest local activism deserves to be called a new one? What exactly is “new” in the new local activism? The answer to this question is actually simple. These are not just new people, because many of them were involved in different kinds of activities before the “For Fair Elections” movement, including some concrete and local ones. This is not the form of activism or the way of how this activism looks: before the “For Fair Elections” movement, local activists were solving concrete close-to-home problems, and they still solve them now, after the “For Fair Elections” mobilization. Rather, the “newness” can be found in two things: in the way abstract politics and concrete specifics are connected in it, and in the way the different experiences of people are interrelated.

First, the local campaigns before the “For Fair Elections” movement, being the dominant mode of political involvement for ordinary people, were usually organized around one particular issue, which was personally important for the participants, and faded away after the problem was solved (Clement et al. 2010, Gladarev 2011). During such campaigns, the activists tried to keep distant from “politics”, insofar as this was possible (for example, they avoided any alliances with political parties, including opposition ones, and usually insisted that they were not against authority in power). The “real deeds” were both the form and the content of local action before the “For Fair Elections” movement. In contrast, post-protest local activists resolved a number of issues simultaneously, most of which had nothing to do with their personal, private lives. They continued to do “real deeds,” but they were aware not of concrete, personally important problems that needed to be solved, but of *the civic practice of solving problems*. This civic practice of getting real things done was not opposed to politics; moreover, it *was* civic or “god” politics (and thus, for example, it presupposed the struggle with the authority in power, and changing the system in general). The “real deeds”, as a form, coexisted with the political substance and meaning of activity in the new local activism and thus, it obviously was politicized. However, it got democratized as well in the literal meaning of this word, because its goal was changed from solving one, two,

or three particular problems to creating a neighborhood where all dwellers would be involved in decision-making about the environment they live in.

Second, local activism before the “For Fair Elections” movement was quite homogenous in its contingent, not in a sense of the social background of participants but in the sense of their “activist” background: these were the people who had never had any collective action experience before and were not really interested in acquiring it. They just wanted to solve particular problems. The exception was a very few political activists who usually took part in most of such initiatives, but it was hard for them to earn the confidence of ordinary participants who perceived them as a not truly authentic part of the group (as those political activists were obviously not personally concerned with the issue and thus, supposedly, they might have “other” nontransparent interests). Post-protest local activism, on the contrary, consisted of people with similar social backgrounds but with very different activist experiences. The apolitical adherents of small deeds met the political regime’s fighters who were totally unaware of concrete “close to home” problems until they could be used, somehow, against the authority in power. This heterogeneous sense of experiences and know-how, contingent with the new local activism, was not only its distinctive feature in itself, but was also what actually helped “politics” and “specifics” to get along. Thus, an answer can be given to the question posed in the beginning of this section: the phenomenon which has been studied here is important because it shows how politicization and democratization may occur in a society as a result of cultural changes, after and thanks to an event.

However, a skeptical reader may say that the changes described in this work are too small and too local to speak about “politicization in a society.” Well, they are small, of course, even if the scale of the phenomenon is bigger than just the local groups covered in this dissertation. Thus, more than 40 local groups of a similar type were found in Moscow, St. Petersburg and their regions in 2015. However, the number, per se, does not matter as much as the very fact that once emerged, these groups continued to grow in number. While right after the “For Fair Elections” movement in Moscow and St. Petersburg only several such groups were created, their number increased dramatically in the next years. Now every third municipal district in both Russian capitals has its own local activist group. It is worth noting that the members of different groups barely knew about each other, and the new groups did not model the old ones. All of the groups just came through a similar evolution, starting from the election observation and finishing with long-term involvement in a new type of local collective action. Thus, the event of the “For Fair Elections” movement was able to produce plenty of new local groups independently of each other.

Unfortunately, the situation in Russian regions is not that well studied as the situation in Moscow and St. Petersburg. However, the data available allows us to think about what is happening in the regions. Thus, based on the research on Russian non-political activism in the regions (Demakova et al. 2014) we cannot see a clear tendency of merging “real deeds” and “politics” in one single frame. But at the same time, the researchers notice two other trends. First, the majority of non-political

activists in the regions who involved in “real deeds” activities, reject any collaboration with the local authority in power, even if the latter use similar technologies to solve similar problems. Second, politicized activists groups, such as, for example, left-wing organizations, start to participate in “real deeds” activism more and more, and make “real deeds” part of their agenda. Basically, these two types of groups become working together, and the similar evolution might be expected in the regions as well. In the report, the researchers notice the following changes of regional activism because of nationwide “For Fair Elections” movement:

“During 2012, we could observe a) the arrival of new people who switched from politicized issues to local civic initiatives, b) the emergence of a new style of public representation, in particular, new forms of public satire, civic education, street performances, etc, c) widening of Russian public sphere” (Demakova et al. 2014: 160, the author’s translation).

Interestingly, the authority in power reacted on the politicization of local activism, and again, it tells us that it was a real thing. In 2016, the “United Russia” (president Putin’s party of power), announced the creation of the federal project named “real deeds” (*realnye dela*). The project is realized in practice only in a few Russian regions, where local authority collect citizen’s urban concerns and help to resolve some of them. In 2017, the NGO named “For real deeds” were created by the leader of the pro-government movement “the Officers of Russia.” The authority in power thus, when seeing the society’s request for “real deeds” activism and the danger of its politicization, reacts on it by creating visibly similar initiatives but based on collaboration and not conflict with the government.

Thus, besides a new approach to study biography, event and cultural changes, something important has been found out in the actual reality of Russian society. The expansion and institutionalization of the activist practices emerged as a consequence of the “For Fair Elections” mobilization makes this practice an important object of investigation for those who are interested in possible democratic changes in undemocratic societies.

Local groups studied in this dissertation still exist. Two of them are becoming more and more visible. “Headquarters” members won municipal elections in their municipal district in Moscow and now have their own representatives in the local council. “Civic Association” is going to participate in the local election in 2019. All of them run their own social media, including YouTube channels. Some of them give workshops, helping new activists deal with the problems in their neighborhoods.

When speaking about progress made by concrete groups, possible changes in activist political culture is, in general, not as far as it may seem. The groups continue to multiply, and there are successful ones among them. Once emerged, the new hybrid group style, which negotiates the opposition between apolitical and political, can be transferred to other groups through networking, sharing experience, and education of newcomers. The emergence of a new hybrid group style, in itself, would not be a big issue if it

would indicate the possibility of changes in Russian activist political culture in general.

This monograph began with the personal stories of Victor, Tamara, Denis, and Kirill. Each of them did their own thing until their worlds suddenly met with each other at the “For Fair Elections” movement. Once they met, they have never parted ways. Each of them had to become a “traitor to his/herself” in part, but this treason allowed something new to be born from their collaboration. Today, hundreds of people like Victor, Tamara, Denis, and Kirill are transforming the basic norms, rules, and practices of apoliticism. They are not doing it by rejecting small deeds in favor of campaigning on behalf of a party. On the contrary, by their everyday civic practice, they are integrating the familiar and the public, “real deeds” and “politics”. Tomorrow, this will be not hundreds, but thousands of people like Victor, Tamara, Denis, and Kirill. At least, the data hypothesize this, despite the fact that local activist groups that emerged out of the “For Fair Elections” movement were the result of the efforts of small numbers of particular individuals; they managed to create the new understanding and practice of citizenship.

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# ATTACHMENT 1

## Interview guide

### SECTION I

*Please, tell me about yourself. You can start with your childhood and include in your story everything you think is important*

Year of birth, place of birth

**Family:** parents' education and occupation, family material wealth during childhood, parent's political views, political discussions among parents at home

**Preschool childhood:** some meaningful events

**School:** any specificity of school, did well or not, favorite classes and teachers and why them, any activity at school, leadership etc, conflicts with teachers, fiends, any interest in politics, any discussions about politics in social science or history classes or in family

Are there any political events in Russia/USSR or in the world which took place in your childhood and which were meaningful for you at that time, which ones exactly, why there were important for you?

**University:** the name of university and the department, how did you choose it, any activity in university, did you like the education there and why, conflicts with professors, any work within or outside campus, any hobbies, any experience of civic and political participation

**After graduation:** any army experience, MA and PhD program, all the occupations in chronological order until now days, any experience of civic and political participation, any hobbies, any meaningful events/experience until now days

**Now:** occupation, income, hobbies, leisure activity, any preferences in reading/movies/art, is there anything that prevents you from full self-realization in your profession or life in general? Could you designate yourself as a member of any class/social group? Generally speaking, could you describe yourself as an active person, a leader?

Were there any events/experience in your life we did not discuss but you consider them as important for you?

### SECTION 2

*Please, tell me how you became involved into local activism. You can start with the very beginning of this story and finish it with today's events*

**The first experience of civic and political activity:** when, what, what was changed after it, any experience of charity including online one

**The participation in the FFE movement:** did you participate, in what rallies exactly, with whom, when you have decided to participate – describe this day, how did you receive information about rallies, any new contacts during rallies, any activity on the rallies, what was changed in your life after this experience, any experience of observation on elections, what did you like and dislike in the rallies

### **New local activism**

**Personal activity:** how did you know about group? How did you join it? Describe all the campaigns you took part in, and what you are planning to do within group in future, and the time spent for the local activism.

**Group's description and activities:** How many members, how people usually join group, who left and why, how many people you know personally, the goal of group, the main activities before and now, participation in municipal elections, electoral campaigns vs local problem solving.

**Group's organizational structure:** any leaders, way of collective decision-making, any division of labor, any schedule of working meetings, what do you usually discuss during working meetings, describe the last working meeting.

**Views, rhetoric, conflicts:** Are there any people with opposite political views in the group, are there any "fractions" and what is the difference between them, "politics" vs "real deeds", conflicts/discussions – describe some of them.

**Personal views, attitudes:** Who are responsible for the problems you are trying to solve, do you know something about similar groups in other districts/cities, is it ok to collaborate with opposition / politicians / local administration / other similar groups / NGOs, does the group need ideology/shared political views, is the group involved in politics now, ideal working model for your group, did you become more interested in the things happening in your neighborhood, did you know more neighbors, did your attitude to your neighborhood change, are you a patriot of your neighborhood?

If you mentally divide your life into different periods, what periods would you identify?

What do you think, how your life will look like in 5 or 10 years? What will you do? Will you continue to be involved in some kind of civic or political activity?